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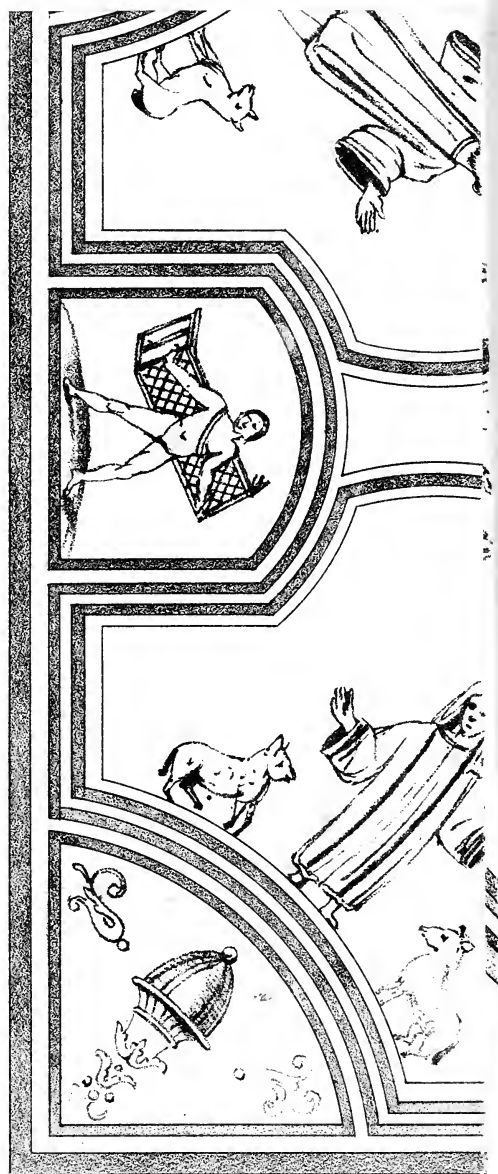


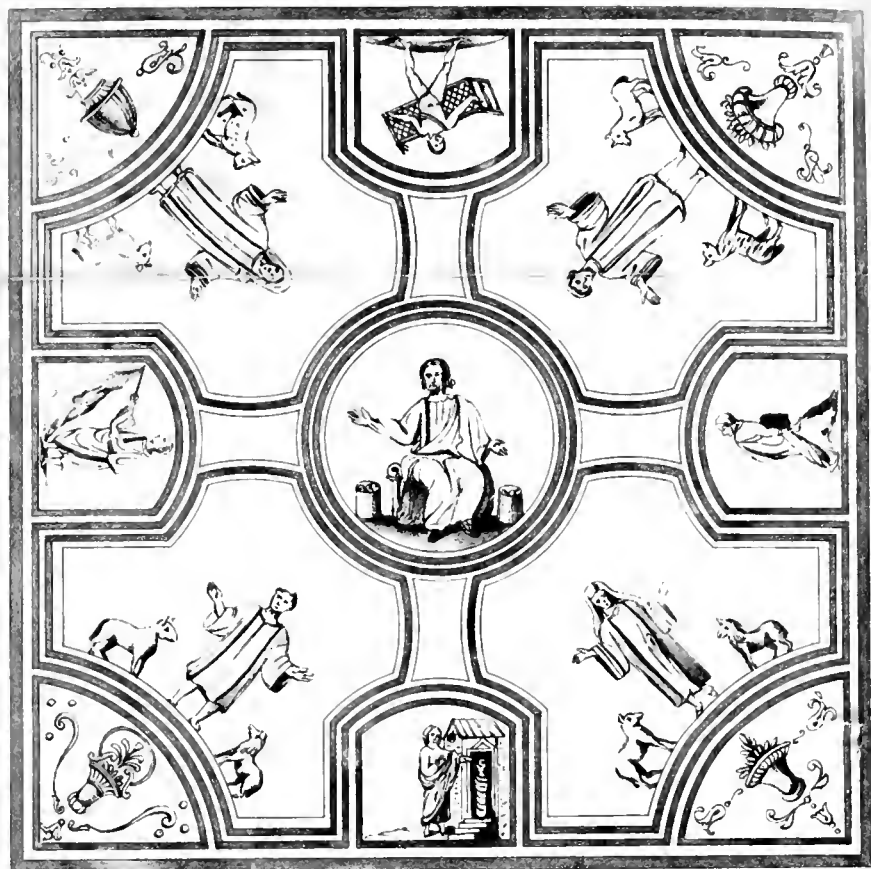
**THE**  
**ROMAN CATACOMBS.**

LONDON :

COX AND WYMAN, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET,

LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS.



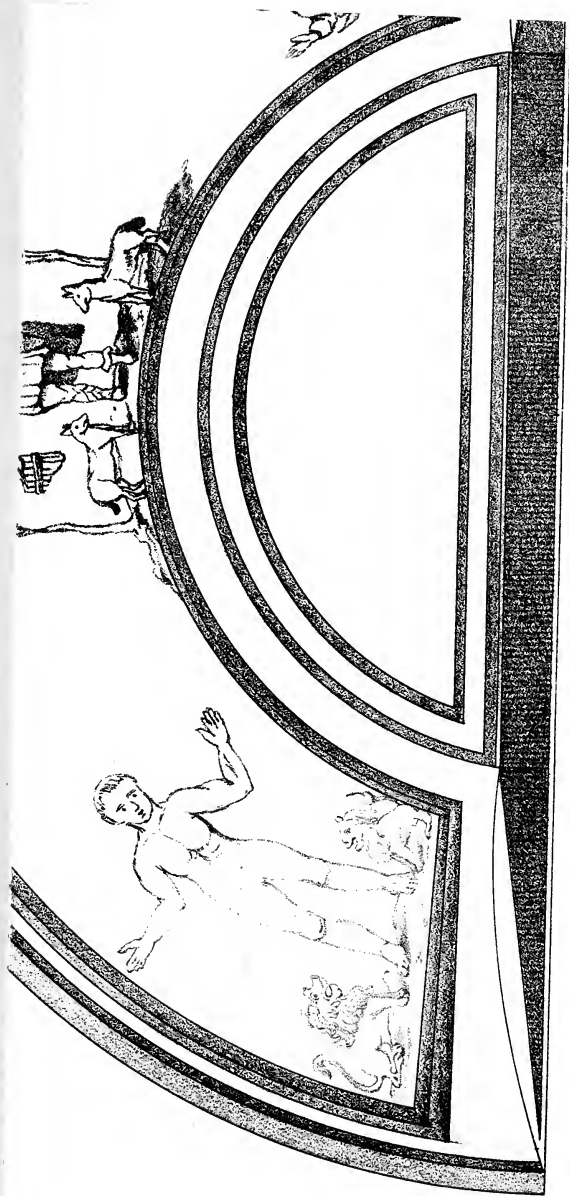


PLAN OF THE ROOF OF A CHAPEL IN  
ST. AGNES.



ARCOSOLIUM.





ARCOSOLIUM.

913.37  
N81  
1759

Arthur Moorth.  
Rome. Jan. 1863

THE

# ROMAN CATACOMBS;

OR,

## SOME ACCOUNT OF THE BURIAL-PLACES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN ROME.

BY

REV. J. SPENCER NORTHCOTE, M.A.

LATE SCHOLAR OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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**I**N the summer of 1847, I was requested to write a series of letters on the Roman Catacombs for a periodical then about to be published. The letters were written in the following spring, and appeared at various intervals in the *Rambler* of 1848 and 1849. Although they were not written until after many visits to the Catacombs, they did not profess to be anything more than a compilation from the standard works of Bosio, Arringhi, Boldetti, Lupi, Marangoni, D'Agincourt, and Marchi. As soon as they were finished, however, I gave myself up to a more diligent study of the whole subject, not only by a careful re-perusal of these and other volumes, but also by a laborious and systematic examination of the cemeteries themselves.

Day after day, during the winter of 1848-49, I continued to visit all that were in any way accessible; sometimes alone, sometimes with Father Marchi, or

the Cavaliere de Rossi, more frequently with M. Perret, who was at that time collecting his materials for the work which the French Government has since published. The more I examined, the more I became convinced both of the importance of these ancient monuments, as illustrating the earliest pages of Ecclesiastical History, and of the insufficiency, and in many respects incorrectness, of those descriptions of them which had hitherto been published in this country. To supply this deficiency, and to put an end, if possible, to that indifference which then generally prevailed among the great mass of English travellers towards these sacred relics of primitive Christianity, I determined to publish in a separate volume a much more detailed account of the Catacombs and their contents, than that which had been sent to the *Rambler*. I spared no pains to make this work as complete and accurate as possible, and already more than half of my task was done, when political disturbances drove strangers from Rome, and obliged me to suspend my labours.

On my return in the autumn of 1854, everything was changed. New monuments of the utmost importance had been brought to light; and the work of excavation, carried on by the command of his Holiness Pope Pius IX., under the direction of a Commission of Sacred Archæology, was daily revealing more. About the same time, the publication of

*Fabiola* effectually destroyed that indifference to the subject on the part of English visitors to Rome, of which I had previously complained. Indeed, during the winters of 1854 and 1855, scarcely a week passed without numerous applications from persons who, either through ignorance of the Italian language, or from whatever other cause, were prevented from availing themselves of other more efficient guides, that I would accompany them to the Catacombs. I did so as frequently as I could, and was seldom disappointed by any want of appreciation of what there was to be seen. Nearly all seemed to find in these subterranean cemeteries an interest far surpassing their expectations; and a wish was very generally expressed that some account of them should be published in England. It was impossible, however, that I should complete the unfinished MS. of which I have spoken. Not only did other more important duties prevent my having time to finish a work on so large a scale, but also the continual progress of discovery would certainly render any large work very imperfect, even whilst going through the press. On the other hand, it seemed a pity not to make some use of the materials which had been collected, and after two or three ineffectual attempts to consign the whole subject to abler and less-occupied hands, I have been persuaded to publish the following pages.

They have been put together principally with a view to two ends : first, to supply the general English reader with a short but trustworthy account of the leading features of the Roman Catacombs ; secondly, to supply the English visitor in Rome with a practical guide to all that is best worth seeing in them. Perhaps these two ends may sometimes have interfered with one another ; on the whole, however, I believe it will be found that as the earlier chapters of the work provide for those who can see the Catacombs for themselves all the preliminary information which it is essential that they should have in order that they may derive pleasure and profit from what they see, so the later chapters may be read with interest even by those who have no opportunity of making any of the visits which they describe.

After having said thus much by way of apology for the defective *form* of the following chapters, it only remains to add concerning the *matter* of them, that none of it is the result of original research and discovery, but that all has been received from those profound students of the Catacombs, Padre G. Marchi, S.J., and Cavaliere G. B. De Rossi, through whose kindness I was enabled often to accompany them in their subterranean visits. I have only put it into an English dress, that it might be within the reach of all our countrymen, and so tend to counteract the mischievous effects of certain cheap publications upon

the subject which are in circulation among us, and of whose authors it would be charitable to believe that they have been misled by books, and never really visited the places which they have undertaken to describe.

J. S. N.

ST. DOMINIC'S STONE,  
*Feast of All Saints, 1856.*





## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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THE rapid sale of the first edition of this little work, as well as its translation into the French and German languages, seem to show both that there was need of some such publication, and also that the author has not been altogether unsuccessful in his attempt to supply that need. A visit to Rome during the past winter has enabled him to make a few necessary corrections and many very considerable additions. He has also remodelled the whole upon what he considers to be a more convenient plan. At the same time, no one is more conscious than himself of the many imperfections and deficiencies which yet remain. Some of these are a necessary consequence of the limits which he has assigned to himself; whilst others arise from the accidental circumstances of hurry and interruption under which the present edition has been prepared for the press;—*deficit et scriptis ultimæ limæ meis*. The subject, however, is one of so much importance, and of such general interest, that it seemed better to publish the work as it is rather than to postpone the publication to some

distant and uncertain period, with the hope of finding more leisure to complete it. Only let the reader remember that it is a short and popular Manual which is here put into his hands, as an introduction to the study of the Catacombs, not a complete and scientific exposition of the whole subject, for which the necessary materials are perhaps scarcely yet discovered.

LONDON :

*Feast of the Annunciation of Our B. Lady, 1859.*

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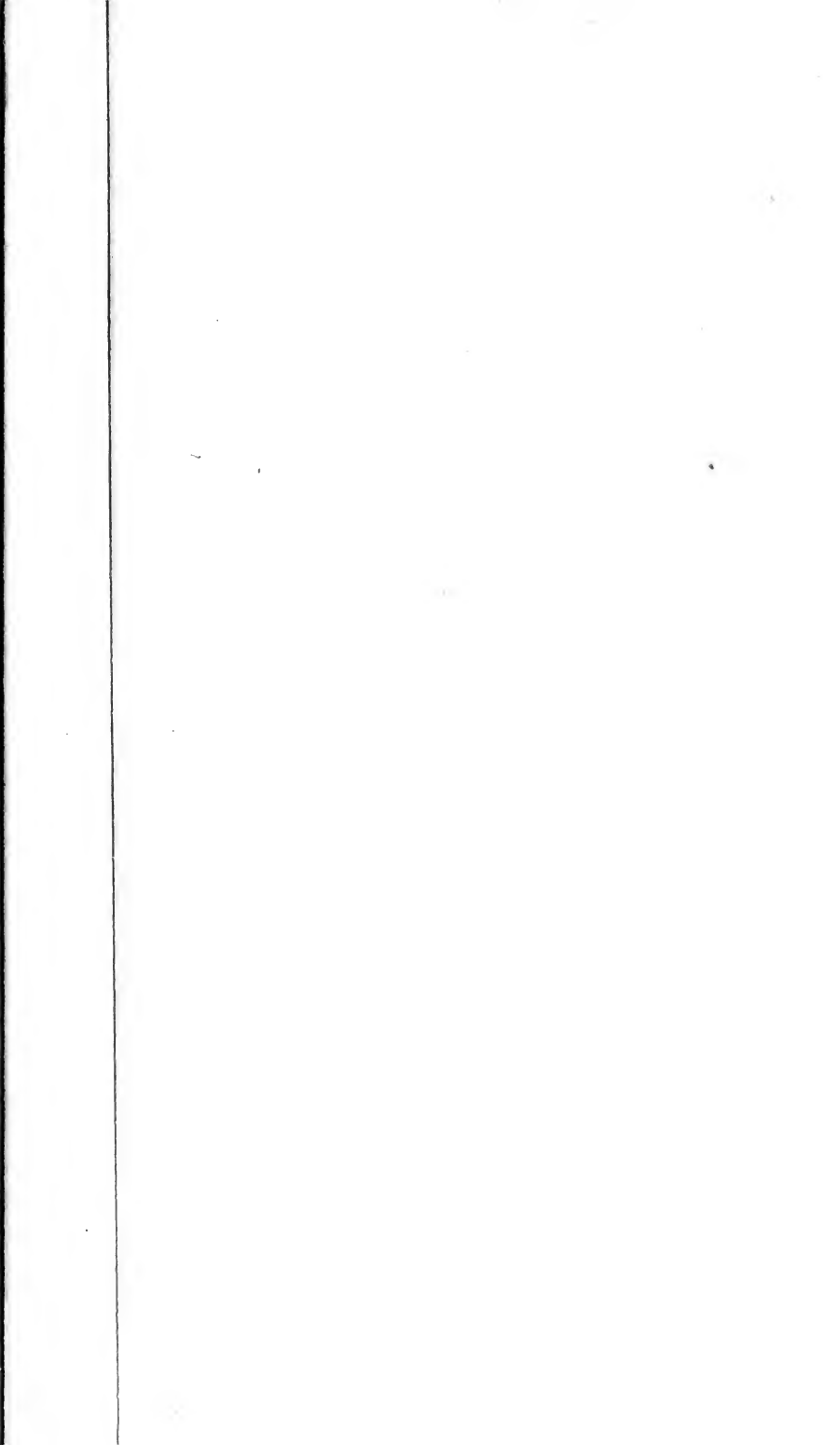
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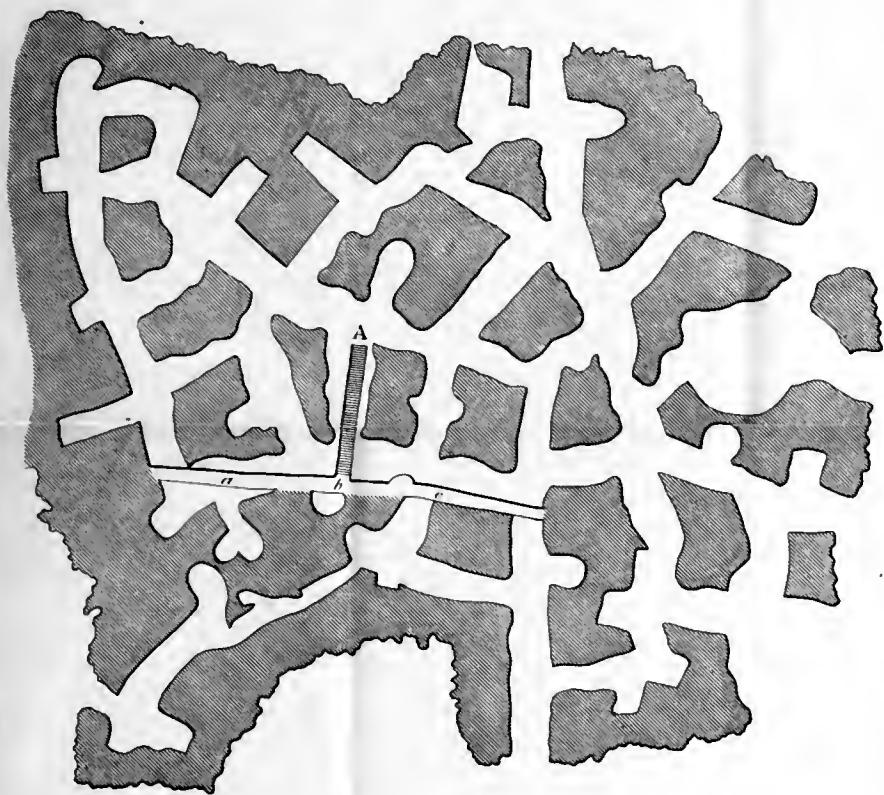
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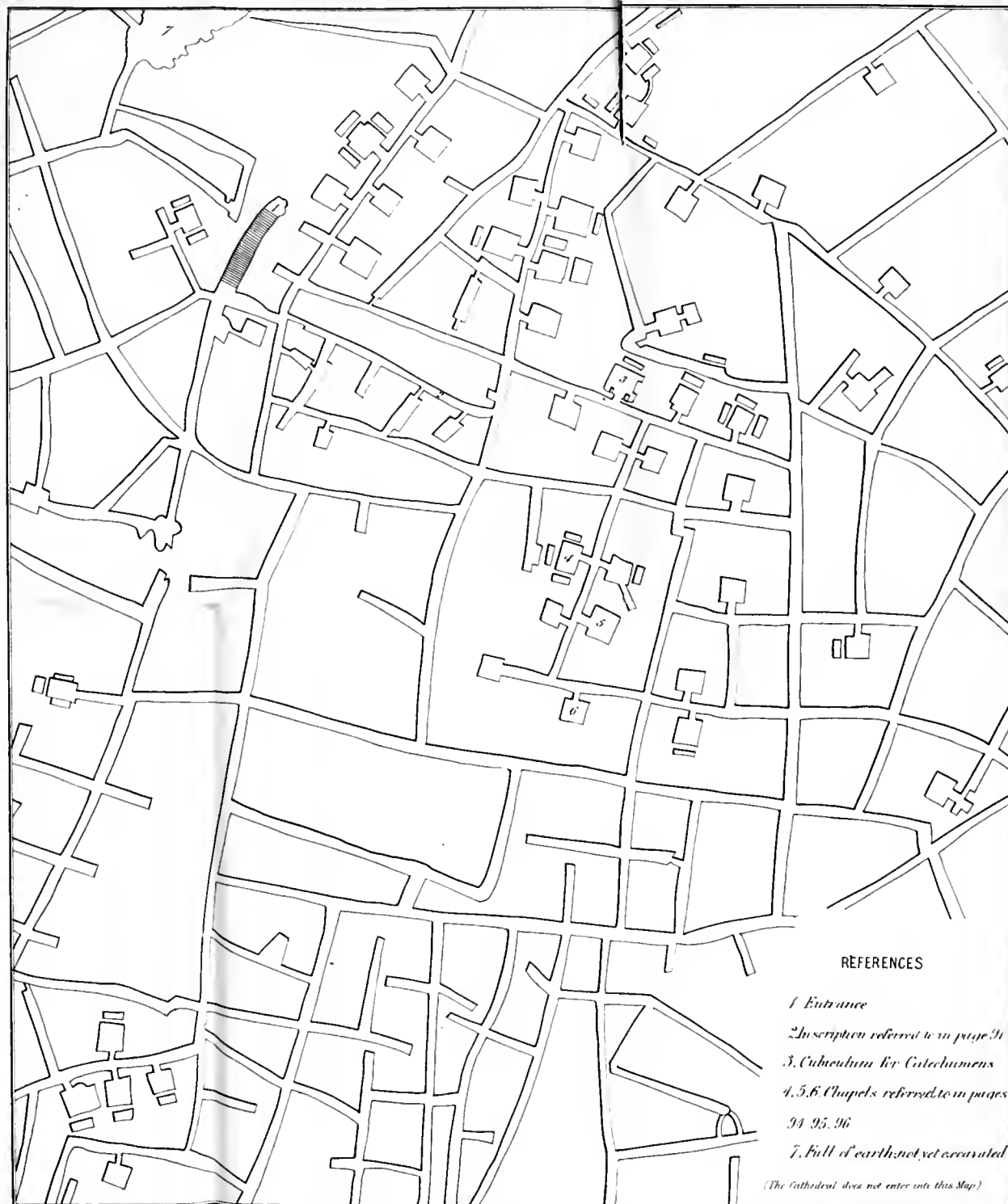


PLAN OF A SMALL PORTION OF THE  
ARENARIA OR SANDPIT  
OVER THE CATACOMB OF ST AGNES.



*A. Staircase descending into the Catacomb  
a.b.c. Shews the width of a gallery in the Catacomb below.*

London, Catholic Publishing & Bookselling Company Limited (C Dolman Manager) 61 New Bond St



REFERENCES

- 1 Entrance
  - 2 Inscription referred to in page 91
  - 3 Cubiculum for Catechumens
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PLAN OF A SMALL PORTION OF THE CATACOMB OF ST AGNES ON THE VIA NOMENTANA



# THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ORIGIN OF THE CATACOMBS.



THE subterranean excavations in Rome, which are now commonly known by the name of Catacombs, may be briefly described as labyrinths of galleries hewn out of the living rock, crossing and recrossing one another in all directions, and here and there opening into small chambers of various shapes and sizes. The walls both of the chambers and of the galleries are pierced with a series of narrow shelves, one above the other; and these shelves, now open, and for the most part empty, once contained the bodies of the dead, and were closed with facings of tile or marble.

The first and most interesting point upon which every one desires information, concerns the origin of these remarkable excavations. Who made them? and when? and why?—questions upon which the most extravagant theories have been broached by different authors in past ages, and many of them are even now repeated by writers who derive their knowledge from books, and not from personal inspection.

Bishop Burnet, the historian of the Reformation, who, as far as I know, was the first to introduce

the subject into English literature, does not hesitate to assert\* that “those burying-places that are now graced with the pompous title of Catacombs are no other than the Puticoli mentioned by Festus Pompeius, where the meanest sort of the Roman slaves were laid, and so without any further care about them were left to rot ;” and, in order to explain the many tokens of Christianity which had been found there, he goes on to conjecture that these same Puticoli became the common burial-place of all Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries ; and that, about the same time, a few monks “made some miserable sculptures and some inscriptions, and perhaps shut up the entries into them with much care and secrecy, intending to open them upon some dream or other artifice to give them the more reputation ; but that, a few only being upon that secret, either those might have died, or, by the many revolutions that happened in Rome, they might have been dispersed before they made the discovery ; and thus the knowledge of these places was lost, and came to be discovered by accident in the last age.” A conjecture such as this, gratuitously supposing an imposture of such gigantic character as to involve the forgery of several thousand inscriptions, and this, too, to have been perpetrated in entire secrecy, scarcely needs refuting ; still, as even this, too, has been repeated in our own times, we will just observe that open pits, such as the Puticoli are described to us, where bodies were exposed to public gaze and left to putrefy, to the great annoyance and injury, as we are told,† of the whole neighbourhood, can have

\* *Some Letters from Italy and Switzerland in the years 1685 and 1686.* Rotterdam, 1687. Pp. 209, 211.

† Horace, Sat. i. 8 ; Festus in verb. ; and Varro.

nothing in common with a regular series of subterranean galleries such as we see in the Catacombs, where every corpse had its own place, carefully hewn out in the rock, and as carefully closed in again with bricks and mortar.

A second theory, less extravagant, but equally untenable, supposes the Catacombs to have belonged to Pagans and Christians in common; in fact, that they were the general cemetery of the whole Roman people. But that Christians and Pagans should have consented to lay their dead in a common burial-place, every student of antiquity must allow to be antecedently improbable. We know how exclusive the Pagan Romans were in the matter of sepulture, every family having its own mausoleum, and, indeed, accounting it unlawful to be buried among strangers.\* Is it likely, then, that they should have admitted to share their tomb those whom they hated and despised as they did the Christians,—hating them as the enemies of mankind, and despising them as the most contemptible offshoot of the degraded Jews: more especially when we remember the fierce persecutions which were raging from time to time? Surely they never allowed those whom they so remorselessly slaughtered to rest in the same burial-place with themselves. Neither, on the other hand, would the Christians have been any more tolerant of this community of sepulture. We need only look into the Old Testament, to see how solicitous were the Patriarchs to choose their place of rest among the faithful; thus we read of Abraham purchasing a burial-place for himself and his family; of Jacob, on his deathbed, requiring a solemn promise from his children not to bury him in Egypt, and of Joseph

\* Cicero, de Legibus, ii. 22; de Off., lib. ii.

commanding that his bones should be carried by his people out of that place. And surely under the New Dispensation, the people of God would have been at least equally jealous of the sacredness of their place of rest.\* Indeed, what Christian at the present day does not cling to the hope of being buried among his own brethren, and in ground set apart and consecrated for the purpose? And again, since idolatrous rites accompanied Pagan funerals, it is clearly impossible that any Christian should have exposed his own grave or that of those he loved to such contaminating contact.

But, besides this antecedent improbability, it should be remembered also that, with very few exceptions, the customs of the Romans, at least from the later times of the Republic, was not to bury, but to burn the bodies of the dead, and then to enclose their ashes in an urn, and so commit them to their place of sepulture. Consequently, the Pagan burying-places in Rome with which we are acquainted are of the kind called *columbaria*, or dove-cots, from the little niches, like pigeon-holes, into which these urns were placed. The graves in the Catacombs, on the other hand, are long and narrow, evidently intended to receive the human body in its full proportions; indeed, in some the skeleton may still be seen: nor has there been found in them a single instance of a sepulchral urn, nor of a place in which one was ever deposited.

The evidence on which this theory of a community of sepulture has been grounded is simply this—that

\* St. Cyprian specially enumerates it among the enormities of the heretical bishop of Astura, that he not only “frequented the riotous banquets of the heathen,” but even “buried his children among profane sepulchres and in the midst of strangers.”

in the Catacombs many heathen inscriptions have been found ; an evidence, the weight of which, though at first sight it seems considerable, a little examination will altogether destroy. Let these heathen inscriptions be read, and they will be found in very many instances to be strangely out of harmony with the place where they have been discovered. Some, for instance, though closing the mouths of tombs, are not sepulchral inscriptions at all : others again, which are sepulchral, bequeath in express terms a place of burial to children and servants for many generations, although the graves to which they are attached are only capable of containing each a single body ; of some, again, the letters have been either wholly or partially erased, or filled up with fine cement. Still more frequently the Pagan inscription has been found on the inner side of the slab, with sometimes a Christian inscription on the outer one : or it has been placed sideways or upside down ; but, in every instance where a Pagan inscription has been found in the Catacombs, it has been so placed as in some way or other to denote that it was not intended for the purpose to which it was there put, and that in its present position it has no meaning. Instances of this may be seen in the lately-discovered Catacomb of S. Alessandro on the Via Nomentana, where the graves are as yet unopened, precisely in the state in which they were found. There several of the marble slabs which close the graves bear Pagan inscriptions ; but all the inscriptions are either on one side or upside down, so making it manifest that the slabs were not originally prepared for the place in which they now are, but were taken by the Christians wherever they happened to find them, and used for their own purpose, just as we know to have been done in many other instances. Thus, in

the temples of Egyptian Thebes, ancient as they are, travellers tell us, may be traced, by this very evidence of inscriptions, the ruins of other fabrics more ancient still, used for mere materials in building them ; thus, too, the Athenians used pillars and gravestones for building their city walls ; and we know what unsparing use has been made in this way of the remains of ancient Rome ; the Coliseum, for instance, having served as a quarry from which were drawn the materials of the Barberini Palace.

Thus far all authors of any credit are unanimous : all not only reject the ridiculous idea of the Catacombs being the same as the Puticoli, but also are of one accord in asserting their use to have been exclusively Christian. When we come to inquire further, however, into their origin, we are no longer guided by the same consent of authorities. Boldetti, Bottari, and other writers of name, have supposed that the Catacombs, or at least that portion of them nearest the surface, were excavated at a period long anterior to the Christian era, perhaps even coeval with the foundation of the city, being in fact quarries and sand-pits, from which were drawn the materials of which many of the palaces and public buildings were constructed, and that they were afterwards arranged, enlarged, and rendered available for the several purposes of sepulture, worship, and occasional refuge by the persecuted Christians.

The seeming modesty and antecedent probability of this theory have caused it to receive very general acceptance ; nevertheless, we may venture to say, that the increased knowledge of the present day has convincingly proved it to be false. We freely acknowledge that there were large subterranean excavations existing in Rome and its neighbourhood at the time of the Christian era, and that they were sometimes



used for purposes of concealment. Thus we read in Cicero\* of a young nobleman being enticed into one of these places, and there treacherously murdered; and in another Nero† was advised, in his last extremity, to seek a temporary hiding-place. Indeed, without having recourse to history at all, we have but to look around us, and we may see many such existing at the present day, which may, for aught we know, have existed before the foundation of the city. No one can ride or drive in the Campagna without soon growing familiar with the arched openings in the rocky banks skirting its ravines, which look like entrances into subterranean grottoes; and we know how the hunters in the Campagna complain of the foxes disappearing into these mysterious depths, and being hopelessly lost underground. Probably, also, there may be very many such excavations whose entrances are hidden, having been for centuries choked up by the falling or washing in of soil. Moreover, we are well aware that some of these old sand-pits were so far connected with the Christian Catacombs, as that these last were often excavated beneath them, the entrance to the Catacomb being placed, for the sake of concealment, in some remote corner of the sand-pit; but that the cemeteries themselves are nothing more than converted sand-pits has been completely disproved by the researches of Father Marchi and others.

In the first place, if we examine any of the sand-pits which are known and acknowledged to be such, and compare them with the Catacombs, we shall see that each of these two kinds of excavation has its own marked characteristics, distinctive of the use for

\* Orat. pro. Cluentio.

† Suetonius in Vit. Neronis.

which it was intended. In the sand-pits the passages vary from ten to twenty feet in width, having been made for the transit of slaves, and beasts of burden, and even of carts and waggons employed in the transport of the sand ; while those in the Catacombs seldom exceed three feet, and are often still narrower. In the Catacombs, moreover, the galleries are straight and regular, and the walls, so to call them, quite perpendicular ; and such an arrangement was essential to the use for which they were intended, namely, the excavation of a number of shelves, the one above the other, for the reception of the dead. In the sand-pits, on the other hand, the only object having been to extract the greatest possible quantity of material, the galleries are irregular, and the arch of the roof springs immediately from the ground : in fact, only such portions of the soil are left as it would have been dangerous to remove. A visit to the Catacomb of S. Agnes, on the Via Nomentana, and the sand-pit which lies over it,\* will suffice to show, not only how radically different in character they are from each other, but also that, while further excavation might so change the appearance of a Catacomb as to make it look like a sand-pit, nothing could change a sand-pit so as to make it look like a Catacomb.

Then, again, the object of making sand-pits or quarries being to procure materials for building, it is obvious that they would only be made where such materials are to be found of quality sufficiently good to repay the trouble and expense of excavation. Now it so happens that the soil in which most of the Christian Catacombs are dug is comparatively with-

\* See the Plan at the beginning of this volume : it is drawn on the same scale as the Map of the Catacomb adjoining it.

out use or value, and in some cases altogether so. In the Catacomb of S. Ponziano, for instance, on Monte Verde, and that of S. Valentine, on the Via Flaminia, the soil is a mere marine or fluvial deposit, made up of earth and sand-shells and pebbles, vegetable and animal fossils, and other heterogeneous materials. For what purpose could excavations have been made here in Pagan times? The work of making them was expensive and laborious, from the nature of the soil, which required solid substructions of masonry to resist its tendency to fall in; and, after all, they contained nothing to reward the toil, neither sand fit for making cement, nor stone that could be used in building. These, it is true, are exceptional cases, almost all the other Catacombs being excavated in the tufa; but it is a curious fact, that their excavators have always chosen by preference just that particular kind of tufa which is comparatively worthless for purposes of building. The volcanic soil of the neighbourhood of Rome is mainly of three kinds: the *tufa litoide*, as it is called, which is a hard stone, somewhat rough and coarse, but serviceable for building; the *pozzolana*, which is a pure sand, an invaluable material for giving strength and consistency to cement; and the *tufa granolare*, which is of an intermediate quality, and of much the least value, being too soft and friable to be used in building, or even to bear transport to any considerable distance, and, at the same time, requiring to be broken and crushed before it could be used as pure pozzolana. Now it is in this very *tufa granolare* that almost all the Christian Catacombs are excavated. And if they were originally dug, as we contend, simply for purposes of sepulture, the reasons for the choice are obvious. That miles upon miles of narrow galleries should

have been hewn out for the sake of extracting a material so inferior and of such limited usefulness is clearly most improbable; but for the object the Christians had in view, not only was the *tufa granolare* the most favourable, but it was the only one of the three kinds of soil we have enumerated which suited it at all. For this, rocks of pure pozzolana would have been altogether useless, for this sand is so void of solidity that it gives way even under the pressure of the hand, while the *tufa litoide*, on the contrary, is so hard that excavation in it to any considerable extent would have been too costly and difficult for their circumstances. It was just the *tufa granolare*, useless for every other purpose, which was exactly suited to theirs, having consistency enough to admit the necessary excavations, while, at the same time, it was not too difficult to work.

These considerations seem to us perfectly to demonstrate that the Catacombs were of Christian origin as well as of Christian use; that from the first they were excavated by the Christians, and by them alone, for the purpose of sepulture, and in this conviction all who have devoted themselves to a diligent examination of the subject may be said to be now unanimous.

It is often asked, in objection, how so much soil as must have been removed in the process of excavation could have been disposed of without betraying to the Pagans the secret of the work which was going on. But to this there are many satisfactory answers. First, the Catacombs, as we have seen, being often immediately under the sand-pits, the soil, broken and crushed by long subterranean carriage (for many parts of the cemeteries are distant a quarter or even half a mile from any exit to the open air), may have

been brought out through the common entrances, as if it had been pure pozzolana, dug in an ordinary way.

Then, again, the Catacombs were often excavated under the private property of Christians of the wealthier classes, where concealment was of course comparatively easy. The Acts of the Martyrs tell us of many noble Roman ladies who eagerly craved the privilege of receiving the mortal remains, the "trophies," as they were called, of those who had died for the faith, and burying them in their own ground; and the martyr's grave often became the nucleus of a Christian cemetery for such of the faithful as lived in that neighbourhood. Thus, after the Apostle St. Paul had suffered martyrdom at the *Aquas Silvias*, now the Tre Fontane, on the Ostian Way, Santa Lucina, a Roman matron, buried his body in a field belonging to her, a little nearer to Rome on the same road, and so began the cemetery which afterwards bore her name. Another Roman matron of the same name, two hundred years later, fetched the body of St. Cornelius from Civita Vecchia to Rome and buried it *in prædio suo*, in her own field, and a small Catacomb was immediately formed around it. The newly-discovered Catacomb of S. Alessandro is a third instance of the same kind; and there are numerous others.

Moreover, it would almost seem as though there *had been* sometimes a great difficulty in removing the soil, for it was not unfrequently transferred to some neighbouring gallery, whose walls had been already filled with as many bodies as they were capable of receiving. Many of the paths were found by Bosio, as they have been also by more recent excavators, obstructed with this broken tufa; and indeed, to this day, every visitor to the Catacomb of

S. Callixtus may observe the same thing in many of the galleries which he traverses ; the paths are filled in this way to the depth of three or four feet ; showing indisputably either that it was impossible at that particular period to carry away the soil, or (which answers the purpose of our present argument quite as well), that the labour of removal was greater than any profit that could be made of it when removed. In either case our conclusion is confirmed, that the Catacombs were not a Pagan work, undertaken for purposes of gain, but exclusively the work of Christians.

It is objected, however, again, that the Catacombs are far too extensive to have been excavated by a small and persecuted community such as were the early Christians ; and the consideration of this objection launches us at once upon a sea of uncertainties ; first, as to the real extent of the Catacombs, and secondly, as to the number of persons professing Christianity in Rome during the ages of persecution.

Upon neither of these points have we the means of forming a really accurate estimate ; and we must be content with merely general statements and such probable conjectures as can be fairly deduced from the evidence within our reach.

First, then, as to the extent of the Catacombs, we may dismiss at once those absurd exaggerations with which certain ignorant *custodi* are wont to excite the astonishment of strangers ; as for instance, that the cemetery under the church of S. Sebastian on the Appian road reaches to the Piazza di Spagna in Rome ; nay, that *all* the Roman Catacombs are connected one with another, and that they form a network of subterranean excavations throughout the whole of the Campagna, extending from Tivoli on the one side to Ostia on the other. These ridiculous

misstatements are abundantly disproved by those accounts of the Catacombs which were written whilst yet their history was known and they were frequented for purposes of devotion. It is clear from those accounts, as also from the most accurate local examination that has yet been made, that the different cemeteries, even of a single road, rarely communicate with one another, much less the various cemeteries of different and distant roads.

Still, throwing aside this exaggeration, the real extent of the Roman Catacombs, as far as it can be guessed at, is enough to strike us with wonder. Father Marchi has hazarded a conjecture, that perhaps there may be eight or nine hundred miles of streets, and six or seven millions of graves, in all these subterranean cemeteries taken together; and he adds, that he considers this estimate to fall short, rather than to exceed the truth. But however this may be, it is clear that the grounds on which it has been made are too insecure a basis for any positive statement. He has mapped with great accuracy a certain portion of the Catacomb of S. Agnes; a portion which he conjectures to be about an eighth part of the whole. The greatest length of the portion thus measured is not more than 700 feet, and its greatest width about 550; but, if we measure all the streets which it contains, their united length scarcely falls short of two English miles; and this would give fifteen or sixteen miles as the united length of all the streets in this cemetery alone. Then, the incidental notices in the old missals and office-books of the Church, and the descriptions given by ancient writers, mention no less than sixty different cemeteries on the different sides of Rome, bordering her fifteen great consular roads; and if we suppose them all to be about the same size, or at

least if we may assume that of S. Agnes to be a fair average specimen, we arrive at the result already given. We have reason to believe that we shall soon have other and more accurate data from the pen of Cavaliere de Rossi, to assist us in coming to a conclusion upon this point: it must needs remain, however, in great uncertainty, until the work of excavation can be proceeded with on a much more extensive scale than the limited funds at the disposal of the Commission at present admit of.

Meanwhile, the objection which we are considering will be urged even more strongly than before. It will be said, that if Father Marchi's calculation is to be received as anything like a probable approximation to the truth, surely it is impossible to believe that a work of such magnitude can have been executed by the Christians during the period of persecution. But we must remember that, though begun (as we shall presently see) in Apostolic times, these excavations were continued until the beginning of the fifth century, *i.e.* for nearly a hundred years after peace was given to the Church; and during this latter period at least the Church would both have required cemeteries of very considerable extent, and also would have been abundantly provided with the means of making them. And even in the preceding centuries, though the Church was from time to time subject to violent persecutions, yet the number of her children was certainly very great from the earliest period, and grew from age to age with a rapidity which was the theme of thankful boast to Christian apologists, and of lamentation to Pagan orators and historians. They are said in the earliest times, when described as "born but yesterday," to have already filled "every city and town and island," and to "swarm in the camp and the council-chamber, penetrating even to



the senate and the palace," so that "nothing was left to the Pagans but their theatres and their temples;" nay, that "the larger half of almost every city was Christian;" and governors of provinces complained that the cattle-markets were depreciated through the lack of purchasers of the victims usually offered in heathen sacrifices.\* Without attempting to reduce these general expressions into precise arithmetical numbers, the mere fact of the Christian religion having become that of the empire, on the conversion of Constantine, with so faint a struggle, is enough to corroborate their truth in the main. On the whole, therefore, we conclude that it is impossible to show any certain inconsistency between the presumed extent of the Roman Catacombs on the one hand, and the presumed paucity of the early Christians on the other; and our original statement remains unshaken, that these vast subterranean cemeteries must be admitted to have been of Christian origin, as well as to have been put to a Christian use.

If we go on to inquire what can have suggested this peculiar mode of burial, the answer is not difficult. Our blessed Lord Himself was buried just in this very way,—“in a new tomb hewn out of the rock;” and such we know was also the custom of the whole Jewish people. Now, a short time before the birth of Christ, Judæa had been made tributary to Rome by the victorious arms of Pompey, and many thousands of its inhabitants had been transferred to Rome, where a particular district on the right bank of the Tiber had been assigned for their habitation.†

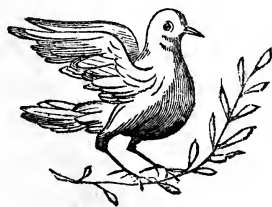
\* See Tacit. Annal., lib. xv. 44; Porphyry, apud Euseb., Præp. Evang., v. 1; Plin., Ep., lib. x. 97, ad Trajan.; Tertullian, Apol., c. 37.

† We cannot be mistaken in supposing that the *Trans-*

We know how justly tenacious the Jews always were of everything connected with their religion, and therefore we may be sure that, in a matter so peculiarly sacred as funeral rites, they would adhere, as far as they could in a strange land, to the customs of their forefathers: and not only would they turn with horror from the funeral pile of their heathen conquerors, but if they could in any way accomplish the laying their dead in rocky sepulchres, such as those of their own distant country, they would spare no toil in their work. And, in fact, outside Porta Portese, the gate nearest to their quarter of the city, the indefatigable Bosio, in the winter of 1602, discovered a Catacomb which, for various reasons, he judged to have been theirs. It was excavated about half-way up the ascent of Monte Verde, in the *tufa granolare*, which forms the intermediate stratum of that southern extremity of the Janiculum. He describes it as exactly resembling in every particular the Christian Catacombs, except that there is a total absence of all emblems exclusively Christian, while the tombs are marked with such representations as the Ark of the Covenant, the seven-branched candlestick of the temple, and other Jewish tokens. The lamps, too, and terra-cotta vases, were impressed with the same figures; and in a fragment of a Greek inscription he read the word "synagogue." He adds that the general character of the Catacomb denoted more of poverty than any of the Christian ones,


*tyberinus ambulator* of Martial, the dealer in broken glass and similar wares, was an Israelite. Philo Judæus expressly says that the Jews occupied a quarter in Trastevere, and Cicero (*Orat. pro. Flacc. Læl.*) speaks of them as living near the *Gradus Aurelii*, which were certainly in that part of the city. The church of San Salvatore in Corte is supposed to retain in its curious title an allusion to the *Curti Judæi* of Horace, *Sat. i. 9.*

which is what might be expected from the condition of the Jews in Rome, torn as they had been by violence from their own country. Neither are there any chambers, as in the Christian cemeteries, fit for the celebration of religious worship ; which again is what we should expect, for the Jewish religion was tolerated in Rome. Indeed the fact of this Catacomb having belonged to the Jews is now established beyond a doubt, by inscriptions which have been found since the death of Bosio : and the only question which can be raised is concerning its antiquity, as compared with that of the Christian Catacombs. But it is certain that this body of Jews were settled in Rome before the birth of Christ, and that they must have had some burial-place ; and it is very unlikely that they should have forsaken their own mode of burial, whatever it was, to adopt that of the Christians ; while it was very natural for the Christians to take a suggestion from them, when there was everything in the practice itself, hallowed as it was by the example of our Lord's burial, to recommend them to adopt it. Moreover, it is to be observed, that unless this stratum of *tufa granolare* had been preoccupied when the Christians made their extensive Catacomb of S. Ponziano, on this very Monte Verde, they would certainly have taken possession of it, instead of making the difficult and dangerous excavation we have before alluded to in the wretched soil, which is only a higher stratum of the same hill.



## CHAPTER II.

### HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.

 F our account of the origin of the Roman Catacombs be true,—and it is the only one which is ever received by those who have carefully examined them,—it follows that their history must date from the very introduction of Christianity into that city,—a conclusion which the monuments that have been found in them abundantly confirm. When the first Roman Christian died, how was he buried? His surviving friends would not have burnt his body according to the custom of their Pagan neighbours, neither would they have allowed it to be thrown, like those of the Roman slaves, into open pits, there to rot among the carcasses of brute beasts and other vegetable and animal refuse. They would have treated the temple of the Holy Ghost, hereafter to be raised again to everlasting life, with every token of respect, and given it honourable burial. Perhaps the deceased was a converted Jew, like Aquila and Priscilla and other of the earliest Roman converts—certainly there were many such among his brethren,—and the Christian community, thus made familiar with the Jewish mode of burial, could do nothing better than adopt the same for themselves also. The Jewish cemetery itself would of course have been closed against them; but some Christian of the wealthier class may have offered his garden or vineyard for the purpose, or they may have

taken possession of some exhausted quarry or sand-pit, and proceeded to excavate beneath it. Where and when this first beginning was made, it is impossible more accurately to define. One of the gravestones that has been discovered bears the date of the third year of Vespasian's reign, *i. e.* A.D. 71 ; but it is not known from which of the subterranean cemeteries this was taken. A few others bear dates of different years in the beginning of the second century ; but these dates, though abundantly sufficient to establish the primitive antiquity of the Catacombs as places of Christian burial, do not enable us to determine which particular Catacomb is the oldest ; indeed, it is highly probable, or even certain, that several must have been begun together, from the very earliest times. For, however few the Christians may have been, they were not confined to a single quarter of the city, but dispersed here and there among the whole population ; and the burial of their dead, a work of difficulty and secrecy at all times, would have been rendered almost impracticable, if it had been necessary to traverse the whole length or breadth of the city in order to arrive at the one only burial-place of the faithful. In the very few instances in which the monuments mention the place of residence of the deceased, it is found to have been very near the cemetery in which they were buried ; and if this practice was observed for convenience' sake, in time of peace (for the monuments referred to belong to the latter half of the fourth century), it can have been nothing less than of imperative necessity during the earlier period of persecution. On all sides of Rome, then, began almost simultaneously that system of excavation for the purpose of Christian burial, which, persevered in for more than 300 years, produced at last a subterranean city of most extraordinary extent. The architects (so to

call them) of this city were the *fossores*, or diggers, a class of men, reckoned by some ancient authors as forming the lowest order of clerics, or, according to others, a mere voluntary association of laymen, like those religious confraternities which became so common in mediæval and later times, who devoted themselves, from motives of Christian charity, to this difficult and dangerous work. They may have been taken from the poorest class, accustomed, perhaps, before their conversion, to somewhat similar occupation in the vast quarries and sand-pits of the neighbourhood of Rome ; but whatever their rank in civil society, their Christian heroism, and the value of their services to the primitive church, can scarcely be exaggerated. Not only did they provide places of burial for the dead, and of worship and refuge for the living, but they did all this at the daily peril of their lives ; their duties, at least as long as persecution lasted, being a literal repetition of the work of Tobias, of whom it is written, that “ he hid the dead by day, and buried them by night ; ” theirs, in truth, was a service of continual martyrdom,—first excavating these deep and dark galleries, and then coming forth to undertake the yet more perilous task of fetching thither the bodies of the dead.

For it must never be forgotten that this was the one primary purpose for which the work of these excavations was begun. It was *forced*, I may almost say, upon the early Christians as the only, or at least as the best, mode of providing for the burial of their dead. Presently, however, the circumstances of their condition naturally suggested to them another use to which it might be put ; viz., the providing of places for religious assembly.

We know from different passages in the New Testament, that the Christians from the very earliest

times, were in the habit of meeting together in some stated place, for the public worship of God. Lucian, who lived in the time of Trajan, and was therefore contemporary with some of the Apostles, describes them as assembling in "an upper chamber, richly ornamented with gold," which must of course have been in the house of some wealthy Christian, for the Church could not at that time have built any public edifices of this kind. In the time of the emperor Alexander Severus, however, we read that they took possession of a certain open, unoccupied plot of ground, which had been hitherto used by the *popinarii*, or cooks, and where the soldiers were in the habit of meeting, to eat, drink, and riot, and that they built a church there; that the *popinarii* made a formal complaint to the emperor, who rejected it, and confirmed the Christians in their possession, saying that he would rather God should be worshipped there under *any* form than the place should be occupied by such worthless characters.\* After the time of Severus, churches must have multiplied; for, in the nineteenth year of Diocletian, one of the imperial edicts of persecution was "to destroy the churches," which, indeed, according to some writers, amounted at that time to as many as forty. Still, however, persecution being always threatened, it was necessary for the Christians to have some more secret and secure places of meeting, to which they could have recourse when need required; and such they found in the Catacombs.

We shall have another more convenient opportunity of pointing out various marks by which these sub-

\* This was on the site of the present Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, which is therefore often called the oldest church in Christendom.

terranean chapels may be distinguished from other chambers of the same size, but which were never intended for any other use but burials. At present we would only observe that the existence of these places was no secret to the Pagans; for we find in some of the imperial edicts whereby Christianity was proscribed, a separate article expressly forbidding the followers “of this new superstition” to hold assemblies in, or even to enter, those places which they call cemeteries. Moreover, the common reproach of the heathen against the faithful, that they were a skulking, darkness-loving race,\* can only have originated from the same cause. But though the general fact of the existence of the Catacombs was sufficiently known, yet the heathen had no means of ascertaining their exact number and extent, or the precise position of each, and still less the internal order and arrangement of their chambers and galleries. Hence, on one occasion, when a number of Christians were seen entering together into one of these subterranean crypts to visit the tombs of the holy martyrs, Chrysanthus and Daria, the heathen emperor ordered the entrance to be hastily closed up with a vast mound of sand and stones, so that they might all be buried alive; and we read,† that when the tombs of those martyrs were re-discovered after the ages of persecution had ceased, there were found with them, not only the relics of those worshippers who had thus cruelly been starved to death, but also the silver cruets (*urcei argentei*) which they had taken down with them for the purpose of offering the holy sacrifice.

Hence, also, it was sometimes possible to put the Catacombs to a still further use. Besides being

\* *Latebrosa et lucifuga natio*.—Minutius Felix.

† St. Greg. Turon. de Gloria Mart., lib. i. c. 28.



places of burial and religious assembly, they were sometimes used also as temporary places of concealment for the bishops and clergy of Rome, and some few others, perhaps, who might happen to be the special objects of search. We read of Pope Alexander I., in the beginning of the second century, taking refuge here; but of course at that time the excavations could not have been very extensive. Nearly a hundred years later, however—about the beginning of the third century, several popes in succession used them as a hiding-place. Here remained for a while S. Callixtus, by whose name one of the largest cemeteries is still known. In that very cemetery S. Urban baptized the husband and brother-in-law of S. Cecilia, and the others who were converted by her eloquent persuasiveness; and there also took refuge S. Pontian, S. Antherus, S. Fabian, and S. Cornelius, all of whom succeeded one another without interruption in the see of Peter, from the year 198 to 252, and were buried in the same cemetery. At this last date a bitter persecution was raging against the Church, under the order of the Emperor Valerian, who was one of those who forbade the Christians to enter these places. The pope who came next after S. Cornelius (with the exception of S. Lucius, who reigned but a few months) was S. Stephen, and, in spite of this imperial prohibition, he lived for some time in the Catacombs, and there both administered the sacraments and held councils of his clergy, until at length, his place of retreat having been discovered, the ministers of death broke in upon him, as he was celebrating the Holy Mysteries in one of the subterranean chapels; and, after waiting, as if struck with a strange reverence, till he had ended the sacrifice, they thrust him back into his episcopal chair, and murdered him on the spot. S. Sixtus, who succeeded

him, was also martyred in the Catacombs ; and thirty years later, S. Caius (also Bishop of Rome) lay hid here for eight years, and only came out at last to join the noble army of martyrs. This was during the persecution of Diocletian, and is the last instance of the kind on record under the heathen emperors ; but even after Christianity had become the religion of the empire, Pope Liberius (A.D. 359) was glad to take shelter in the cemetery of S. Agnes for a year or more, until the death of the Arian emperor Constantius, and, after him again, S. Boniface I., in the beginning of the fifth century, remained hidden for a time in the cemetery of S. Felicitas, during the troubles consequent on the election of the anti-pope Eulalius.

It appears, however, that, with but few scattered exceptions, it was only the sovereign pontiffs, or other persons peculiarly sought after by the persecutors, who took refuge in these cemeteries for any length of time, and that the idea which has more or less prevailed, that the great body of the faithful, or even any considerable number of them, found shelter here in seasons of persecution, is altogether erroneous. Not only would the difficulty have been insurmountable of conveying sufficient food into these recesses to maintain any great number of people, but there are no chambers there suited to such a purpose, nor any arrangements of any kind which indicate any such design. ~~As~~ As places of burial, their characteristics are most distinct, and so also as places of worship, the halls or chambers which abound in them being evidently suited to that end ; but there is absolutely no appearance whatever of their ever having been intended as a dwelling-place, neither do we read of their having been ever used as such, save only, as we have said, occasionally by the sovereign pon-

tiffs, and in some other altogether exceptional cases.

Such, then, were the uses to which the Roman Catacombs were put during the earliest ages of the Church ; but with the cessation of persecution opens a new era in their history. They were no longer needed as places of refuge when there was no longer any danger to avoid, nor as places of daily worship when churches were rising in every quarter of the city ; and they soon gradually ceased to be used as places of burial. The latest date which has yet been found on any grave in the Catacombs, is of the year A.D. 410,\* and there is evidence that during the latter part of the preceding century, the practice of burying here had been already falling into disuse. S. Augustine mentions a pious desire of the ancient Christians to be buried as near as possible to the tombs of the martyrs ; and the Catacombs, even in their present state, furnish abundant proof of their practice in this regard. Sometimes they blocked up a considerable portion of the area of some of the chapels, by building a monument with bricks and mortar, or by introducing a marble or stone sarcophagus ; sometimes they dug common graves, or buried sarcophagi in the floor or pavement (so to call it) of the chapels ; still more commonly, they excavated graves in the space at the back of the altar (corresponding to what would now be called the *reredos*), not sparing even the most beautiful paintings with which the devotion of their forefathers had ornamented it. After all, however, there was a limit to the number of persons for whom places of burial could be thus provided. Pope Damasus, in one of

\* The later dates quoted by Bosio and other authors prove to have really belonged to tombs in the adjacent cemeteries, porticos of basilicas, &c.

his inscriptions in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, tells us of his own desire to be buried among a goodly company of martyrs in a particular chapel, and at the same time of the impossibility of gratifying that desire, without the risk of disturbing the bodies of the saints, which he durst not do;\* and we may be sure that what was denied to the head of the Church, could not have been accomplished by any other of her members. Indeed, we are inclined to suspect that all those who were buried in any of those modes that have been just described, must have been persons of merit or distinction, either in the ecclesiastical hierarchy or in some other way; and that for the great body of Christians, even before the end of the fourth century, there were provided cemeteries of a more ordinary kind above ground. Be this as it may, the conclusion, at least, is certain, that, after that period, burial in the Catacombs became extremely rare, if it was not absolutely prohibited.

A very special and peculiar interest, however, could never fail to invest them, both as monuments of a past period of heroic struggle and suffering, and as a treasure-house wherein were deposited the mortal remains of those who, during that period, had kept the faith at the expense of their lives, and had handed it down safe to those who lived to behold the Church in peace and triumph. Accordingly, for several centuries, the faithful were wont to rush in crowds to pay their devotions in these holy places. "When I was a boy," says S. Jerome, "being educated in Rome, I used every Sunday, in company with other boys of my own age and tastes, to visit the tombs of the apostles and martyrs, and to go into

\* *Hic fateor Damasus volui mea condere membra,  
Sed timui sanctos cineres vexare piorum.*

the crypts which are excavated there in the bowels of the earth. ~~The~~ The walls on either side, as you enter, are full of the bodies of the dead, and the whole place is so dark that one seems almost to see the fulfilment of those words of the prophet, 'Let them go down alive into Hades.' Here and there a little light, admitted from above, suffices to give a momentary relief to the horror of the darkness; but as you go forwards, and find yourself again immersed in the utter blackness of night, the words of the poet come spontaneously to your mind: '*Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.*'" Prudentius, also, describing the cemetery of S. Hippolytus, tells us that "not far from the city walls, there lies hid among the vineyards a deep and darksome crypt; a steep path with winding steps leads you into its hidden recesses, and the light which gains admission through this entrance suffices for awhile to guide you on your way. As you advance further through the narrow and intricate streets, your progress is illuminated by an occasional ray finding its way through an opening made in the roof; so that, in spite of the absence of the sun, you enjoy its light far below the level of the ground. In such a place as this lies the body of S. Hippolytus, near to the altar of God; so that the very table from whence is distributed the bread of life is also the faithful guardian of the martyr's corpse; the same slab preserving his bones for the eternal judgment, and feeding the Romans with holy food. Marvellous is the devotion of the place, and the altar is ever ready for those who will come and pray. I have myself poured forth my supplications there when I have been sick in body and mind, and never have I failed to obtain relief. Numerous are the debts I owe to Hippolytus, for Christ our God has given him power to grant whatsoever any man

may ask of him. Hence, from sunrise even to sunset the people may be seen flocking hither to pay their devotions to the saint ; and not the Romans only, rich and poor, men, women, and children, but long trains of people from Albano and all the neighbouring cities, and even from Nola, Capua, and other more distant places.”

This eager devotion towards the Catacombs produced certain changes or additions to their original construction. It became necessary to provide new and more convenient entrances, instead of the original ones, which had purposely been made as narrow and in as retired a situation as possible, for the sake of secrecy ; often, as we have seen, in some concealed corner of a deserted sand-pit. Now, on the contrary, they were made in public, and close to the high-road ; as that by which we descend to the Catacomb of S. Agnes, for instance, on the Via Nomentana ; and where many famous martyrs were buried in different parts of the same catacomb, different entrances were made, leading as directly as possible to the tombs it was desired to visit ; as, for instance, to those of S. Cornelius, of S. Eusebius, and of S. Cecilia, in the cemetery of S. Callixtus.

Now also were made, if not all, yet certainly most of those *luminaria*,\* as they were called, or apertures to the open air, of which both Prudentius and S. Jerome speak ; apertures which were made, not so much for the sake of light, which could be provided more effectually by artificial means, but rather for the sake of freshening the air and promoting its circulation through those long narrow galleries. Some such apertures must have been almost essential to the safety of those who frequented these places ; for,

\* For the plan of a *luminare*, see Plate 2.

in spite of the excellence of the Roman cement, whereby the tiles which closed the graves have been kept in their places for fifteen hundred years, and even now refuse to yield except to extreme violence, yet it seems scarcely possible but that some degree of noisome effluvia should have escaped from such a multitude of corpses collected together into one place, more especially whenever any of the double or treble graves were reopened to receive those bodies for which they had been reserved ; and if we add to this the number of lamps which were continually burning at the corners of the streets, and before many of the graves, and always during the celebration of any religious function, as well as the heat which must have been produced by anything like a numerous gathering of people within the narrow limits of a subterranean chapel, it is easy to see that the atmosphere of these places would have been absolutely insupportable without some such contrivance.

It was not enough, however, for the Church of the fourth century to improve the means of ventilation in the Catacombs, and to provide more commodious access to the tombs of the martyrs ; the subterranean chapels themselves were far too small to receive the crowds who hurried thither, especially on the festivals, or birthdays, as they were called, of the different martyrs ; and therefore it became the care of the Christian emperors to raise churches over many of the cemeteries, more or less spacious, according to the greater or less celebrity of the martyrs buried in the catacomb beneath. Thus, in the reign of Constantine, instead of the subterranean chapel which had been constructed by S. Anacletus over the grave of S. Peter, in the vaults of the Vatican, was built the Basilica of S. Peter, on the very spot where stands the present wondrous edifice. At the same

time were built the Basilicas of S. Paul, S. Laurence, S. Agnes, and many more ; some of which, or at least buildings on the same site, and bearing the same name, exist, as we know, to the present day ; whilst others, destroyed by the barbarous tribes who at intervals poured down upon the city, have never been rebuilt.

These same barbarous hordes rifled some portions of the Catacombs themselves, in the middle of the fifth century, in hopes of finding treasure ; and thus began that system of devastation which led ultimately to their neglect and ruin. Pope John III., however, in the year 509, took pains to repair the injuries that had been done to them, and ordered that oblations, candles, and all other requisites for saying mass at some of their shrines, should be supplied every Sunday from the Basilica of S. John Lateran. Gregory the Great, too, towards the end of the same century, in rearranging the stations or places of assembly for the faithful on the various holidays of the year, besides the Basilicas and other churches, included in the catalogue many of the Catacombs. Honorius I. also, A.D. 625, Sergius I., about sixty years later, and Gregory III., A.D. 732, all interested themselves more or less in preserving and venerating these precious relics of antiquity ; but immediately after the last of these periods came the ruinous invasion of the Lombards, who, rushing down upon Rome, besieged it at several of its principal gates, consumed everything with fire and sword, and finally broke into the Catacombs, and carried off several of the bodies that had been buried there. Pope Paul I., A.D. 761, has left us a most deplorable account of the state of these cemeteries after this sacrilegious invasion. "Many of them," he says, "had been before neglected, and in great measure ruined ; but



now, by the impious Lombards they had been thoroughly destroyed. They had disinterred and carried away many bodies of the saints; in consequence of which, the homage due to such holy places was now carelessly paid; that even beasts had now access to them; and that in some places men had dared to put up folds, and so to convert the consecrated burial-places of Christians into stables and dung-hills." It was for these reasons that he considered it more reverent to cause the bodies of the martyrs to be removed into churches and monasteries within the walls, or, in other words, to translate their relics.

This practice of removing the bodies of martyrs into churches had begun, indeed, long before. Boniface III., in the beginning of the 7th century, had removed a considerable number to the heathen temple of the Pantheon, when he consecrated it to the service of Christianity, on which account it received the name it has ever since borne, of *Sancta Maria ad Martyres*; and Pope Theodore also, in the middle of the same century, removed other bodies on a similar occasion, to the church of S. Stefano Rotondo, on the Cœlian Hill. But, after the shock given by the Lombard invasion, this was done on a much larger scale, and so continued increasingly from the ninth century to the beginning of the thirteenth; as a natural consequence of which, general religious interest in the Catacombs proportionably diminished. Nevertheless, even as late as the beginning of the twelfth century, it was still the custom of the devout Romans, on Good Friday, to visit the cemeteries of the martyrs barefooted and in solemn procession; and Peter the Venerable, who lived about the same time, speaks of having seen in Rome very ancient altars and oratories in subterranean crypts, which

were often visited, and devoutly kissed and revered by the faithful.

It is from the pontificate of Honorius III., in the thirteenth century, to that of Martin V., in the fifteenth, that all mention of the Catacombs seems suspended; and this is sufficiently accounted for by the circumstances of Rome during that troublesome period. The secession of the popes to Avignon and their long residence there, the turbulence of the various political factions, and the disorganized social state of the city and its neighbourhood, pressed too heavily; and we cannot wonder that, when all minds were occupied with these distracting matters, the very knowledge of the ancient cemeteries should have perished, except only of such as were entered through some principal church.

Towards the close of the sixteenth century, Onuphrius Panvinus, an Augustinian friar, wrote some account of their numbers and names; but he appears to have gathered these merely from the Acts of the Martyrs, the Liber Pontificalis, and other ancient authorities, and not to have personally visited any of the cemeteries themselves. He reckoned about forty-three; in which he was followed by the learned Baronius, some five-and-twenty years later; but by this time public interest had been awakened concerning them, and several men of learning and ability were engaged in the study of their monuments. The accidental falling in of a portion of the high road outside the Porta Salara, in the year 1578, brought to light the Catacomb of Sta. Priscilla. At this discovery, "the city," as a contemporary writer records, "was amazed to find that she had other cities unknown to her concealed beneath her own suburbs, beginning now to understand what she had before only heard or read of." Amongst others, Alfonso

Ciacconi, a Dominican, already known as a zealous archæologist, immediately proceeded to examine them and to copy their paintings. He imparted his taste to a noble young Fleming, Philip Wing, who was then visiting Rome, and who pursued the study with great ardour and success. He discovered many more of the forgotten subterranean cemeteries, made faithful copies of everything he found in them, and then studied the most ancient monuments both of Christian art and literature with a view to publishing a complete explanation of the whole. Death cut him off in the midst of his studies, to the deep regret of all his learned contemporaries. A not unworthy successor however soon appeared in the person of Antonio Bosio, a Maltese by birth, and an advocate by profession, residing in Rome as agent or procurator for the Knights of Malta. Bosio, when once he had become interested in the matter, devoted his whole time and fortune to the exploring this subterranean world. Having learnt from the ancient acts of the martyrs and other ecclesiastical records that such and such burials had taken place in a cemetery on the Appian way, for example, he would set himself to explore, with the utmost diligence, all the vineyards and other places in the neighbourhood, to discover, if possible, some entrance into the bowels of the earth, often being obliged to return again and again to the same spot, searching in vain; while at other times a fortunate accident, such as the giving way of a road, or a portion of a vineyard, or, it might be, the digging of a new well, or cellar, or pit for extracting sand, would give him unexpected help. But even when the entrance to a cemetery was discovered, the difficulties in his way were by no means removed, for it was commonly found to be blocked up, and inaccessible without immense labour. At his own

expense, and not unfrequently with his own hands, he had to force a passage through the rubbish which ages of neglect, and various external causes, had accumulated, into the interior; and here also new difficulties awaited him, from the innumerable windings of the galleries, in which it required the utmost caution to advance many steps without the danger of being hopelessly lost, to say nothing of the chances which frequently occurred of finding the pathway suddenly interrupted by a fall of earth, or laid under water. He tells us that the first time he got into what he supposed to be the cemetery of S. Callisto, (Dec. 10, 1593), he had some difficulty in finding his way out, but on his second visit he carried with him a large ball of twine and a quantity of candles, and thus armed, with a spade or two for digging, and with plenty of provisions, he spent whole days and nights in exploring its innumerable galleries. He seems to have become possessed of Wing's drawings, but he was also himself indefatigable in copying all the new paintings which he discovered, in making plans of the most interesting chambers, and sketching all the curious and valuable objects he met with in his search, in order to publish to the world the result of his thirty-three years of unintermitted labour. He died, however, before his work was completed, and left his writings and all his property to the Order of the Knights of Malta. Prince Carlo Aldobrandini, at that time ambassador of the Knights at the Court of Rome, showed these papers to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, librarian of the Vatican, by whom they were consigned to Padre Giovanni Severano, an Oratorian. Under the care of this last, the great work was published, with a few additions, thirty years after the death of its author, and soon went through a second edition; but the impatience of the literary

world prevented its being translated into Latin, as seems to have been the original intention of Bosio; and this was not done until thirty years later, by Aringhi, another Father of the Roman Oratory.

Bosio has been sometimes called the Columbus of subterranean Rome; and though this title cannot with perfect justice be conceded to him, yet it was certainly owing to his work that interest in the Roman Catacombs was again revived in the Catholic world. One consequence of this was, that the practice of translating the bodies of martyrs was resumed, and various Popes granted, from time to time, special privileges for the purpose to different individuals or religious bodies. All these private faculties were subsequently annulled by Clement XI., who desired to reserve the matter more immediately to himself; and his successor, Clement XII., January 13, 1672, made a decree intrusting the care of all the Catacombs to the Cardinal Vicar of Rome. At a later period they were divided between the Cardinal Vicar and the Pope's Sacristan, under whose direction, or the direction of *custodi* deputed by them, the work of excavation proceeded; but, unfortunately, their object in excavating being only the extraction of relics, they did not aim at so preserving the Catacombs as to enable the antiquarian to study either their form or monuments to the best advantage. Boldetti and Marangoni, indeed, by virtue of the office which they successively held as *custodi* of the Catacombs, had the opportunity of seeing much which in Bosio's time was still undiscovered, so that their works may be usefully studied as a kind of supplement to his. Bottari, too, did something towards illustrating the monuments which others had discovered Buonarruoti, in like manner, and P. Garucci, S.J., in our own time, have published works on a particular

class of monuments, the painted, or rather gilded, drinking-cups and other vessels of glass discovered in the Catacombs. D'Agincourt's History of Art, contains specimens of the paintings with valuable criticisms as to their antiquity ; and Lupi, Oderici, Marini, and others, have helped to diffuse some knowledge of the inscriptions. It has been reserved to our own day, however, to review the whole subject on a larger scale, and in a more scientific manner. P. Marchi, S.J., was the first to lead the way, and to revive the public interest in this branch of Christian archæology. He published a series of papers about fifteen or sixteen years ago, accompanied by forty plates of maps, elevations and sections of chambers and galleries, &c., illustrative of the architecture of these cemeteries ; and these were to have been followed by similar series on the paintings and the sculpture. The political disturbances of 1848-9, interfered with the execution of this design ; and the very important discoveries that have since been made are calculated to diminish our regret at the interruption. All lovers of the Roman Catacombs, however, owe a deep debt of gratitude to Father Marchi's work for one thing at least ; viz., the very convincing manner in which it demonstrates their exclusively Christian origin and use. This theory, which had almost come to be looked upon as the dream of an enthusiast, has now, mainly through his means, become so firmly established, that it is scarcely possible to find an author of credit who doubts it. We are sorry that we have no similar debt of gratitude to acknowledge in behalf of a publication, of far greater pretensions, which appeared in Paris in the years 1852—53, at the expense of the French Government, in six volumes folio. The author, a French architect, M. Perret, was indefatigable in his

subterranean visits, and in taking plans and measurements of chambers and galleries. He had many paintings also copied for him afresh ; but these are not always faithfully done, and are far too highly finished to give a true idea of the original. Moreover, he was not equal to the task of making a selection of inscriptions, nor of distinguishing between true monuments and false—ancient and modern. The result, as might have been expected, is most unsatisfactory ; so that, spite of the magnificence of the work, and the good intention of the author, it is calculated to injure rather than to promote the true interests of Christian archæological science.

When the Pope returned to Rome, in 1851, he appointed a Commission of Sacred Archæology, under whose auspices the work of excavation in the Catacombs has been ever since conducted, with the most happy and important results ; and the Holy Father has intrusted the preparation of a new and complete work upon subterranean Rome to one of the most active members of this commission, the Cavaliere G. B. de Rossi. When this work shall appear, it will necessarily supersede every other upon the subject ; for there is no living antiquarian who can at all compete with its author, either in the length of time which he has devoted to these researches, in the minute accuracy of his local observations, or in his intimate acquaintance with all ancient and mediæval documents that illustrate either the history or the monuments of these ancient cemeteries.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CATACOMBS.



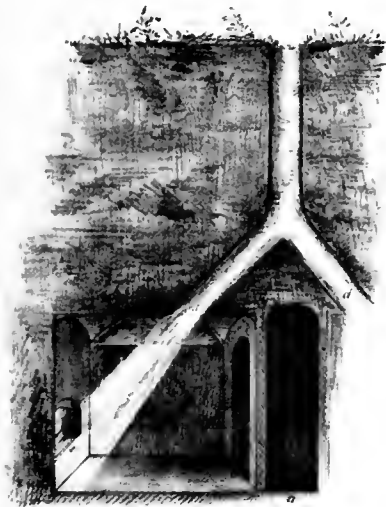
UR readers will have felt some impatience, perhaps, at being detained so long upon the threshold of the Catacombs, when there is so much to interest them within. We could not, however, be satisfied to describe the architecture, the paintings, and other details of subterranean Rome, until we had first given such an account of its origin and history as might enable us confidently to lay claim to the whole as an exclusively Christian work. Having now, as we believe, succeeded in this, we may at length enter, and examine at leisure the internal construction and characteristics of these wonderful cemeteries. On the whole, they are such as we might naturally expect, when once we have attained to a clear knowledge of the use for which they were intended ; but without such knowledge, the whole scene would be incomprehensible.

If we picture to ourselves an immense network of subterranean galleries, varying in height from eight to ten or twelve feet, and generally so narrow that two persons cannot walk abreast in them, with a roof either flat or slightly vaulted, and the walls (so to call them) pierced with a series of shelves, tier above tier, something like the bookshelves of a modern library, we shall then have a fair idea of the Roman





Plate 2.

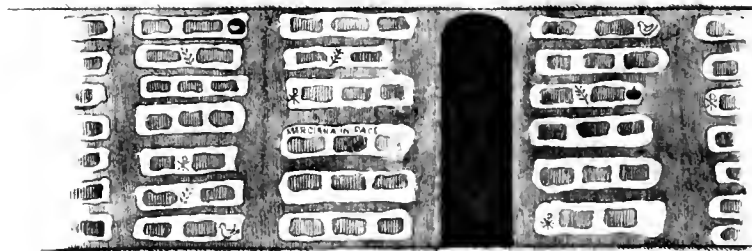


View of Interior of Chapel with Luminaire  
a, Gallery of Calceomb. b, Entrance to Chapel  
c, Arcosolium. d, Section of Luminaire passing  
up the roof of Chapel on opposite side of gallery

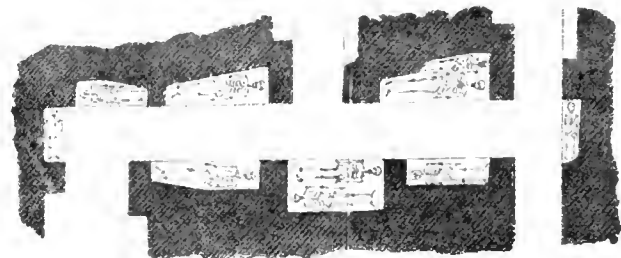


Bottom of Glass Cup representing St. Agnes

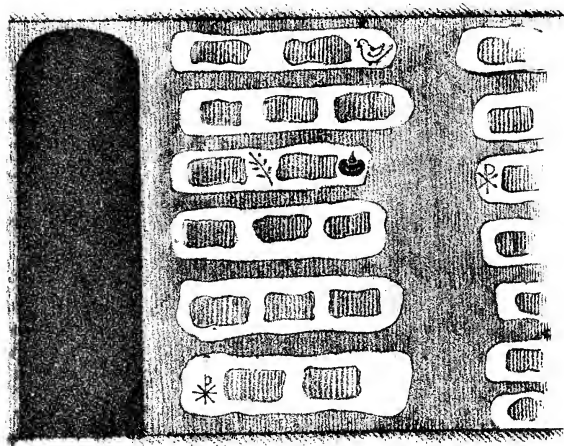
Plate 1.



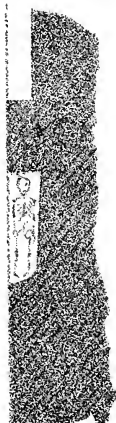
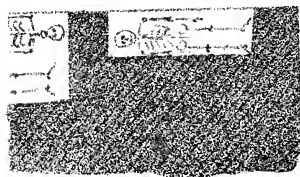
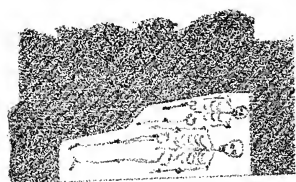
View of one side of a gallery, with closed graves marked with Aquilla, Palm, Lamp, Monograms, &c



Interiors of Graves



es marked with Ampullæ, Palms,



ves.

Catacombs, and shall at once recognize their convenience as a Christian cemetery.

It has been already insinuated that it seems to have been the wish of our forefathers in the faith to bury their dead, as nearly as circumstances permitted, after the pattern afforded them by the burial of our Lord. He was buried, we are told, "in a new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, wherein never yet had any man been laid;" and so we find that the early Christians never, according to the custom of modern days, returned to use a second time graves that had once been occupied, but assigned to each corpse its own separate place, which was never afterwards usurped by another. Narrow horizontal shelves, excavated in the natural wall of subterranean streets, each shelf sufficiently deep to receive a human corpse, having a cornice on the outside, against which the heavy tile or marble slab might rest, with which the monument was to be closed,—such are the graves which we see in the Catacombs; and in describing them, we might use literally the words which describe the sepulchre of our Lord, "a new tomb, hewn out of the rock," in which no corpse was ever laid but the one for which it was originally excavated. Sometimes, indeed, more than one body was laid in the same grave; these bodies, however, were never laid one upon the other, but side by side, the shelf in the wall being excavated to an unusual depth in order to provide the necessary space.

An ordinary single grave was called *locus* or *loculus*: those of larger dimensions were known by peculiar names—*bisomum*, *trisomum*, and *quadrisomum*, according as they contained two, three, or four bodies. Nothing can exceed the simplicity of form of these graves, whether large or small; and, indeed, as might be expected, a most careful economy

of labour characterizes the whole work ; no more soil having been removed than was absolutely necessary for the purpose required. The graves were made wide at the head and narrower at the feet ; and, if two bodies were to be buried together, the soil was excavated only in exact proportion, the feet of the one being generally laid by the head of the other. Even now, as we walk along the narrow paths, and examine the contents of the half-opened graves, we see at once how accurately each was made according to the size of body it was intended to receive ; here a mother and child, perhaps, lie side by side, yet neither in length nor in breadth is there a single inch of unoccupied space ; there, a skeleton of unusual height just touches each extremity of his grave, or the grave had not been made quite long enough, and a little of the rock was afterwards hollowed out at one end or the other to receive the head or the feet. Elsewhere, again, in the thickness of the soil which had been left as a necessary support between two graves, a short and shallow hole has been made, barely of size sufficient to receive the body of an infant just born, baptized, and gone.

It is for this reason, also, that we remark a total absence of order and regularity in the arrangement of the several tiers of graves ; the Christian excavator had no leisure to attend to symmetry ; he was constrained by necessity to mix persons of every variety of stature (men, women, and children) in utter confusion. There are, it is true, exceptions to this rule ; in a portion, for instance, of the Catacomb of S. Cyriaca, the walls are measured out quite with mathematical precision : at one end there are eight graves, one over the other, for the bodies of mere infants ; next to these, the same number of graves for children from seven to twelve years of age ; then

a row suited for adults, but only seven instead of eight, to allow for the increased bulk as well as length of the bodies; and, lastly, six graves of yet larger dimensions. Such instances can only belong to a later period of the Church, when she had more labourers at command, and more leisure to superintend all the details of her work. There are cases to be seen, moreover, in which a methodical arrangement was intended, and in which outlines of the several graves were traced beforehand with chalk or white paint, but the graves themselves have been excavated within the appointed measurement, manifestly because the bodies, when brought to the cemetery, proved to be of smaller proportions.

There is some reason to believe that bodies were not unfrequently brought to the cemetery before the graves were made in which they were to be deposited;\* perhaps it was the custom to remove them hither immediately after death, as, in many parts of Italy, at the present day the body is carried at once to some church or chapel, where it remains during the night, and is buried on the following day, or sometimes it is deposited in the chapel of the *Campo Santo* itself, before preparations are even begun for digging any grave to receive it. At any rate, then as now, in Italy burial followed very quickly upon death, one, or at most two days, being the utmost length of the

\* Such at least seems to be the most obvious interpretation of an inscription lately removed from the portico of Sta. Maria in Trastevere, to the Christian Museum at the Lateran Palace.

PECORI DVLCIS ANIMA BENIT IN CIMITERO VII. IDVS  
JVL. DP. POSTERA DIE MARTVRORVM.

“Pecoris, sweet soul, came [was brought] into the Cemetery of the Martyrs on the 9th of July. She was buried the next day.”

interval between them, as we learn from such of the inscriptions in the Catacombs as mention the date of the death as distinct from that of the burial ; and in times of persecution the bodies were of course carried to these safe hiding-places as quickly as possible. Sometimes, however, the Christians were too jealously watched for some considerable space of time to be able to bring their dead hither at all ; in which case they seem to have encased the bodies in lime, and so to have kept them, perhaps, in their own houses until the danger was past ; large pieces of lime may therefore still be seen in many of the graves,\* having a double impress of the texture of linen upon them, the outside having marks of a coarse kind of linen,—the sheet, probably, which kept it in its place and braced it close to the body,—and the inside retaining the impression of the fine linen in which the body itself was wrapped.

This wrapping the body in fine linen was another point of resemblance between the burial of the early Christian and that of his Lord ; a winding-sheet of that, or of some yet more precious material, was always provided for the covering of the dead, as we read in numerous instances ; even in time of plague, for instance, when certainly no additional expense would have been willingly incurred.† Bosio found many entire corpses in the Catacombs still retaining their linen envelopes, of which, indeed, fragments may yet be seen clinging here and there to portions

\* Father Marchi mentions them in the Catacomb of S. Agnes ; but having been frequently handled without care by numerous visitors, those fragments have almost disappeared. As yet many may be seen in graves in the Catacomb of SS. Thraso and Saturninus.

† Prudentius *Cathemer.*, Hymn x. 48 ; *Peristeph.*, Hymn iii. ; *Anastas. in Vita Sixti III.* ; *Euseb. H. E.*

of the broken skeletons, or the whole complete on the two bodies lately discovered in two sarcophagi of a *cubiculum* in the cemetery of S. Callisto. So, too, was it the practice to strew leaves and flowers on the body of the dead, and to sprinkle it with myrrh and other liquid perfumes. When the heathen accused the Christians of being of a severe and unsocial character, neither crowning their heads with flowers nor anointing their bodies with ointment, the ancient apologists replied that they reserved those things for those who had entered into their rest, and that more precious spices had been brought from Arabia and Saba for the burial of the Christian dead, than for the incense of the heathen gods. Nothing is now to be found in the Catacombs suggestive of this practice ; but Bosio and others, who saw them in a less ruined condition, discovered in some of the graves vases which emitted a very strong aromatic perfume.

With regard to the expenses attendant on this mode of burial, which must have been very considerable, they were no doubt defrayed by the Christian community at large, both in the case of those originally poor and also of those who had become so by giving up their worldly goods to the Church ; but with the rich it was otherwise. As these were required to maintain themselves and all belonging to them during their lives, so they were of course required also to defray the cost of their burial ; and accordingly we find in the Catacombs innumerable inscriptions which indicate the providing of a sepulchre by a husband for his wife, a parent for his child, or *vice versâ*, brothers and sisters for one another, guardians for their wards, or foundlings for their foster parents. Moreover, it was very common for Christians to provide, during their lifetime, their



own place of burial, either purchasing a single and separate place for themselves, or taking the occasion of the death of some near relative to purchase a double grave, half of which was occupied immediately by the deceased, and the other half reserved for themselves. In some of these inscriptions the price of the grave is named, as well as the name of the *fossor* to whom the money was paid ; and one of these, belonging to the consulate of Theodosius and Valentinian, early in the fifth century, mentions a solidus and a half as the price paid for a single grave ; a sum equivalent to about eighteen shillings of our own coin. If this price should appear to any one excessive, it should be remembered that the *fossores*, who must have been very numerous, were probably taken from the poorest class, and as they spent their whole lives in the service of the Church, their maintenance, as well as that of their wives and families, must of course have devolved upon her. It was therefore just and fitting that those who were able to pay for their own burial should be so charged that the superfluities of the rich might supply the necessities of the poor, and all might enjoy alike the honour of being buried in the same manner as their Lord. Indeed, this is one of the most striking characteristics of these cemeteries,—that there is no distinction of rich and poor, but that the same unornamented niches received all alike. Even where private burial-places were provided for particular families, not even these were really separate from the general cemetery of the faithful, and the graves continued to be, for the most part, the same narrow horizontal shelves. A few only, comparatively speaking, are to be found of a less simple character, occupying more space and requiring more labour for their construction. For these tombs the same length

of horizontal excavation was begun in the wall as would have been required for an ordinary grave ; but, instead of being finished in the shape of a parallelogram, it was formed into that of a low-vaulted arch ; and the hollow niche thus made was intended, not to receive the body, but to remain open and empty ; then, in the flat surface thus provided, the grave was sunk perpendicularly, being closed up by a heavy slab of stone or marble, which rested on a ledge left expressly for that purpose. These arched monuments—a kind of sarcophagus hollowed out in the natural *tufa*—were called *arcosolia*,\* and were always made sufficiently wide to receive at least two bodies ; sometimes even three or four. Father Marchi describes some which contained four bodies, lying side by side at the top ; under these, separated from them and supported by a slab of marble, three others ; and under that again, below another slab of marble, a single body. These probably constituted the whole of some private family, who had prepared the tomb at their own expense and for their own use ; and it is most probable, indeed almost certain, from a number of inscriptions recently discovered, that all other graves of this kind that were dug in the walls of the galleries, were, in like manner, the property of individuals of some distinction in the Christian community. Those that formed the altars in the various

\* *Solium* was a word used by the Pagans to designate the tomb or sarcophagus in which they sometimes buried their dead ; and by the Christians also for the urn in which the relics of the martyrs were kept under their altars. The prefix *arco* has reference of course to the arch, or small apse, as it were, which is over these graves ; and the word, as well as the form of grave, is exclusively Christian. We derive our knowledge of the word from the inscriptions. See sketch of an *arcosolium*, and of an ordinary grave, in Plate I.

chapels belong of course to a different category, and were executed by the Church for the burial of those noble champions who laid down their lives for the faith.

It was by no means uncommon, also, for a whole chamber to be appropriated as the private vault, so to call it, of a particular family ; and the chamber was then designated a *cubiculum*, or bed-chamber, according to the same beautiful and Christian sentiment which led them to give to the whole Catacomb the name of *cœmeterium*, or sleeping-place. In one of these *cubicula*, in the cemetery of SS. Nereus and Achilles, may still be seen the inscription which assigns the proprietorship of it to one Marcus Antonius Restutus, who made it (he says) “for himself and those of his family who believe in the Lord.” He does not, however, in this instance, call it *cubiculum*, but uses the generic name *ypogeum*, or subterranean. There are no less than fifty or sixty of these *cubicula* in the small part of the Catacombs of S. Agnes, which has been mapped by Marchi, and a whole row of them may be seen following one another in rapid succession on one side of the gallery adjacent to the chapel of the Popes in the Catacomb of S. Callisto.

Besides these chambers which served as the burial-places of private families, there are others of the same kind in which it is manifest that the holy mysteries were celebrated. These also are very numerous, and of different forms and sizes, generally square, or at least rectangular, though in the Catacombs of S. Cyriaca and S. Callisto a few may be found which are circular, or octagonal, or of some other unusual shape : and generally two will be found to have been excavated immediately opposite to one another on the two sides of the gallery, the

one probably intended for men, the other for women ; for we know that for many centuries it was a rule of ecclesiastical discipline for the two sexes to be separated in the churches, which indeed, as a custom, still prevails in many parts of Italy, Sicily, and other Catholic countries. In these chapels we find an arched tomb, or *arcosolium*, such as has been already described, wherein reposed the bodies of one or more martyrs, and the slab which covered this grave served as the altar. Sometimes a blood-stained vase has been found in these altar-tombs, and sometimes other still plainer indications of the violent deaths of their former occupants : but even where no such tokens exist, we are yet justified in believing, from overwhelming external testimony, that wherever a tomb served as an altar, it was none other than the sacred body of a martyr which lay underneath. Prudentius describes the tomb of S. Hippolytus in the Roman Catacombs as a *mensa*, or table, which at one and the same time gave the Blessed Sacrament to the Christians of Rome, and also faithfully guarded the bones of the martyr committed to its keeping ; and he makes similar allusions, when speaking of the tombs of other martyrs, and in other parts of the world. The testimony of S. Maximus, of Turin, is still more distinct. After quoting the vision of St. John, wherein he “saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God,” who “cried with a loud voice, How long, O Lord (holy and true), dost thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth,”\* S. Maximus continues thus : “What can be more reverent, more honourable, than to rest under that altar on which sacrifice is celebrated to God, victims are offered,

\* Apoc. vi. 10.

and where Christ himself is priest, according to that which is written, 'Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech.' Rightly, therefore, are the martyrs placed *under* the altar because Christ is placed *on* the altar. Rightly do the souls of the just rest under the altar, because on the altar the body of the Lord is offered. Nor is it without reason that vengeance should there be asked for the blood of the just, where for sinners also the blood of Christ is poured out. Most fittingly, then, and for a kind of harmony, or partnership, if I may say so, is it ordained that martyrs should be buried there, where the death of the Lord is daily celebrated, . . . . . that those who for His death have died may through the mystery of His sacrament find rest."\* The expressions used by S. Maximus clearly indicate an established custom; and, in fact, we read that it was ordained by S. Felix before the end of the third century that the holy sacrifice should never be offered excepting upon the tombs of martyrs, just as in our own day it is still required, for the consecration of an altar, that it should have in it some relics of the saints. Nay more, in the case of the subterranean chapels of the Catacombs, it would almost seem as though the chapels had rather been made for the sake of the altars, than the altars for the sake of the chapels; I mean, as though the chambers had been excavated rather for the express purpose of celebrating the Holy Mysteries over the tombs of the martyrs, as an act of distinct and local devotion (on the anniversaries, for instance, of their deaths), than with any intention of their serving, except under the pressure of necessity, for the general gatherings of the faithful; for the largest of them is very small for such a

\* Serm. lxiii. de Nat. SS. ed. Romæ, 1784.

purpose, and most of them will not admit more than a mere handful of worshippers.

Besides the altar, is to be found, in several of these chapels, that which in modern ecclesiastical language is called the credence-table, on which the elements were placed before being given to the priest for consecration. In the chapels of the Catacomb of S. Agnes, this *prothesis*, as it was then called, generally consisted of a small square shelf or ledge of rock projecting into the chamber, and forming part, therefore, of the original design of the excavator. In other chapels it was provided for by a niche, or in some other way. Most of these chapels, too, were richly ornamented with paintings and other ornaments; but of these we will not now speak, as the whole subject of the decorations of the Catacombs is of sufficient interest and extent to require separate consideration.

What has been already said is sufficient to explain the general arrangement and construction of a Catacomb; and any special peculiarities of architectural form or ornament, will more conveniently be described when we come to speak of the particular Catacomb in which it is to be seen. At present it only remains to add that there are sometimes two or three, or even four, tiers of these galleries and chambers, excavated one below the other in the same rock. As soon as the Christian *fossors* found that if their work was prolonged any further in the same direction, it would pierce the side of the hill and come out into the open air, they had but one means of continuing their labours; viz., to make a staircase, diving deeper into the bowels of the earth, there to repeat the very same kind of excavation as above. It does not, however, always happen, that the galleries nearest to the surface were of earlier date than those below

them. In the Catacomb of Pretestato, for instance, as we descend the principal staircase, long before we land at the bottom in the original cemetery, we find a small gallery on the left-hand side, which was certainly the very latest portion of the whole of that Catacomb ; and, in like manner, there are one or two single chambers or vaults in the Catacomb of S. Agnes, excavated above the level of the first and principal floor. Then, again, some of the larger and more lofty crypts belong, we may almost say, to two levels, or *flats*, of the Catacombs at once, the roof being as high as that of any of the chambers on the upper flat, whilst the crypt is really entered from a gallery below. The fact is, that there was ordinarily no other way of adding to the height of one of these subterranean chambers than by lowering its floor ; otherwise the excavation would have reached above the stratum of volcanic rock, and being carried on in the loose superficial soil, could not have had the necessary solidity. It may always be justly disputed, therefore, to which level these loftier crypts should be considered to belong. In truth, the whole question of the relative chronology of the several Catacombs, and of the several parts of any one Catacomb, has not yet received that attention which it deserves ; and it may be confidently expected that the scientific studies of De Rossi will throw as much light upon this, as upon the other no less important point of their topography.



## CHAPTER IV

### PAINTINGS OF THE CATACOMBS.

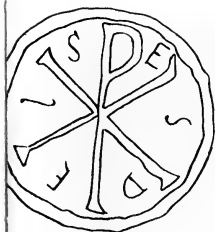


THE subterranean chapels of which we have spoken are in many instances richly decorated with paintings ; and some of these, competent judges of ancient art have not hesitated to assign to the first ages of the Church.

Such, for instance, was the decision of D'Agincourt, whose opinion on the subject is peculiarly valuable ; since he had devoted himself for thirty years to the comparison of the various epochs in the history of the fine arts, and collected illustrations of each epoch from existing specimens ; so that his practised eye must have been keen to discern the chronology of a painting. Moreover, he had had the opportunity of examining the then recently-discovered paintings of Pompeii, which had been overwhelmed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, A.D. 79 ; also the paintings of the Baths of Titus, belonging to the same period, and those of the Tomb of the Nasones, which are of the second century. The decorations of this last, indeed, as also of some *columbaria* belonging to the same period, greatly resemble those of the chapels in the Catacombs, so far as the arrangement and geometrical division of the roof is concerned ; and even some of the subjects, or rather the minor details and accessory ornaments, are the same in both. Art, as we know, was in a more flourishing state for the first two or three centuries after the Christian era than for a very long period afterwards,

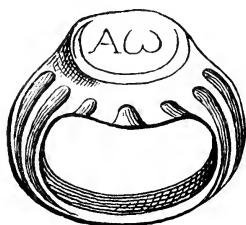
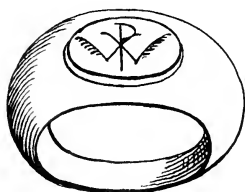
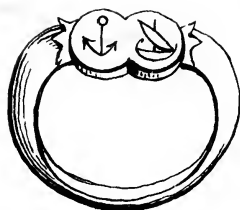


during which the old classical beauty gradually faded and died out, while that which was destined to succeed it—the new special creation, so to speak, of Christianity, the glory of latter ages—had not yet sprung into being. The more skilfully executed, then, of the paintings in the Catacombs, are those to which we must assign the highest antiquity; for it would be manifestly unreasonable to imagine that the Christians could command for their subterranean chapels an amount of artistic skill greater than is exhibited in the baths, villas, and royal palaces of the same period. There are other indications, too, which, as we are told by students of Christian art, may assist us in forming a judgment as to the respective dates of these paintings: as, for instance, the *nimbus* or circular auriole of glory, which we see in all mediæval pictures round the heads of saints, was not used at all until the end of the fourth century, that is, until the downfall of Paganism; and at first it was given only to our Lord, then to His Blessed Mother, and finally to all the saints and angels. In the earliest paintings, crowns are to be seen by the side of the saints, being offered to them by birds, or held in their own hands, but never placed upon their heads. On many of the glasses found in the Catacombs, our Lord is represented in the act of crowning SS. Peter and Paul, or other saints; but the *nimbus* itself may be seen round the heads of these Apostles, as also of the four animals symbolical of the Evangelists, in the mosaics at S. Paul's, executed in the time of S. Leo the Great, A.D. 441, as also in the Baptistry of S. John Lateran, about twenty years later, where, however, the angels are represented without it. P. Garucci concludes that in the fifth century Christian artists either used the *nimbus* or omitted it indifferently; but after that time its use



*Spes Dei.  
Hope of God.*

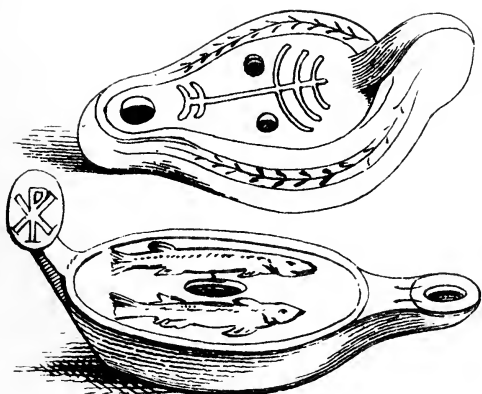
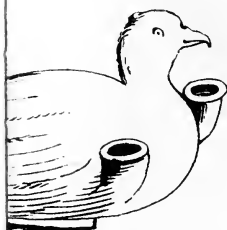
*in several tiles in the Catacombs.*



*Rings found in the Catacombs*

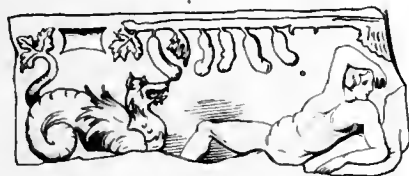


*1175  
155.*



*the Catacombs.*

Plate 3.



Jonas under the Ivy us through his hail just been cast out of the fish's mouth See page 59.



Jonas being cast out of the fish's mouth



Moses striking the Rock



The resurrection of Lazarus



Noah and his Ark



Christian Woman in prayer



A fish carrying a basket which contains bread and a chalice of wine typical of the holy Eucharist See page 67.



A Man fishing typical of Baptism See page 63



Bottom of Glass chalice representing in Fibrous & the fish chalice (or within the paralytic with these children in the fiery furnace and the Son of man protecting them with his rod of power of our Lord changing the water into wine



Biblical Visitation Christe Mayest thou live in Christ inscribed on one of the Marble Slabs



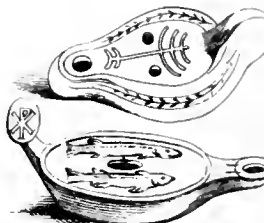
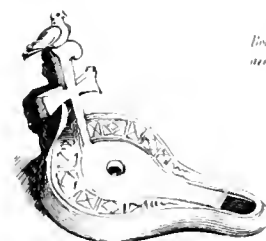
Spes Dei Hope of God Stamped on several tiles in the Catacombs



Rings found in the Catacombs



Bottom of a Glass chalice, the figures are Enamelled in Gold See page 135



Lamps found in the Catacombs.



became universal. Whenever, therefore, we meet with any paintings in the Catacombs which represent a bishop or a martyr with a *nimbus* round his head, we immediately refer them to a period later than the ages of persecution, and, in many instances, they belong to a period very considerably later; for, as the Church delighted, as we have seen, in venerating with fervent devotion the heroes of her past age of struggle, it was only natural that she should continue to adorn with painting the tombs in which their bodies reposed. When those bodies were removed into the churches of Rome, there was of course no longer the same motive for decorating the sepulchres; but until this was done, *i.e.* until the seventh, eighth, or ninth century (according to the date of the translation of the particular saint in question), the paintings may have been renewed again and again by succeeding generations. Thus we are not surprised to find, in the cemetery of S. Callisto, paintings of S. Cornelius, pope and martyr, and his cotemporary S. Cyprian, both in full ecclesiastical costume, and carrying the book of the Gospels in their hands; of S. Sixtus also, S. Urban, and S. Cecilia in the same Catacomb. All these belong, probably, to the fifth or sixth century; they can scarcely have been later, for a reason which shall be given when we come to speak of that Catacomb in particular.

The great majority, however, of the paintings in the Catacombs are referred by every competent judge of art to a much earlier period. It is true that, in the first centuries of the Christian era, painting seems to have been looked upon by the Church with a watchful and jealous eye, on account of its having been so perverted by Pagan use, that all the associations with which it was then invested were those of

idolatry or licentiousness. Nevertheless it was certainly used among Christians, though cautiously, from the very beginning. We read in Tertullian, who wrote in the second century, of the cups used by Christians being ornamented with representations of the Good Shepherd ; and the same authority tells us in what form our Saviour was generally painted. Eusebius, too, mentions the painted images of the Apostles handed down from ancient times, and similar allusions occur in S. Augustin,\* as also in S. Basil, S. Chrysostom, and other Greek Fathers. There is therefore no antecedent improbability to oppose to the judgment of the competent critics in art, who assign, as we have said, to many of the paintings in the Catacombs, as high an antiquity as the first or second century of the Christian era ; nay, there is much, both in ecclesiastical records and the paintings themselves, to approve and confirm that judgment.

The mere accessory ornaments are sometimes the same as are to be found in contemporary Pagan edifices ; and all the more important subjects, though of course of an exclusively Christian character, are just such as we should expect to have been wrought in a season of persecution. It is true that there are no representations of the physical sufferings of the martyrs, such as make us shudder at the present day from the walls of S. Stefano Rotondo on the Cœlian ; though we read in Prudentius that such, in his time, were sometimes painted on the sacred tombs : on that of S. Hippolytus, for instance, he saw, as he describes, a picture of that saint dragged by wild horses over the rocky coast of Ostia ; but these paintings were certainly the work of the age of peace, not of persecution. During the actual pressure of persecution, it

\* *De Consensu Evang.*, lib. i. c. 10. See also Tertullian, *de Pudic.*, c. 10 ; Mabillon, *Præf. in IV. Sæc. Bened.* § 3,

was the care of the Church to spare her children any of these distressing representations, and, if their life on earth was to be one of pain and peril, to surround their place of burial with every image that could suggest cheering and invigorating thoughts, and at the same time to instruct and impress deeply on their minds the soul-stirring realities of that faith for which they might any day be called upon to shed their blood.

Perhaps the subject of all others most frequently represented in the Catacombs is the Good Shepherd, the very one to the ancient use of which Tertullian bears testimony. Some critics, indeed, have called in question the Christian meaning of this figure, and have most extravagantly supposed it to have been borrowed from an ordinary heathen type, and the tomb of the Nasones has been quoted as presenting a similar picture. It is true, of course, that among the pastoral images in which the heathen poets so often delighted to indulge, that most graceful and touching one of a shepherd carrying the tender lambs in his bosom, or bearing on his shoulder an over-weary sheep, can scarcely have escaped them; and it is true also that, in this tomb of the Nasones, there is the figure of a goat-herd, carrying a crook in his hand and bearing a kid on his shoulder. But there is nothing in the details of this figure which suggests any particular resemblance to the Good Shepherd in the Catacombs; on the contrary, there is much to distinguish them. It is clearly an allegorical figure representing Spring, and it fills a compartment in one corner of the vaulting, the corresponding compartments in the other corners being also represented by appropriate emblems of the other seasons. Again, unlike the Good Shepherd in the Catacombs, it is a naked figure, and is represented as

dancing with a nymph, who bears a basket of flowers, there being a pyramid of roses between them. In truth, the very facts which have principally suggested the idea of the Good Shepherd having been taken from a heathen type, are rather themselves proofs of its Christian origin; certainly they are capable of receiving a most exquisite Christian interpretation. Thus, it is objected that the shepherd in the Catacombs is sometimes painted with a goat instead of a sheep, and with a pipe or some other musical instrument in his hand, which last was the ordinary characteristic of the heathen Pan. But why should not the Christian artist, representing our Lord as the Good Shepherd, give him also all the usual appendages of a shepherd, more especially one which is so suggestive of a spiritual interpretation as to have been actually used by one of the early Fathers? "The Good Shepherd," says S. Gregory Nazianzen, "will at one time give his sheep rest, and at another drive and direct them,—with his staff seldom, but more generally with his pipe;" nay, the words of our Lord may be said to breathe the same idea: "My sheep know my voice;" and I believe it will be found, as a matter of fact, that the paintings of the Good Shepherd by the ancient Christians far more commonly put the shepherd's pipe into his hands than the shepherd's crook. So again, if a goat be sometimes found in these pictures instead of a sheep, or even together with the sheep, and occupying the place of honour on the right hand whilst the sheep is on the left, this certainly is no proof of the artist's heathenism, or ignorance of our Lord's parables, but, on the contrary, it may not improbably have been intended to involve a deep theological meaning. One of the very earliest heresies which arose to trouble the Church was that of the Mon-



tanists, who denied the power of the Church to forgive certain of the more heinous sins. Adulterers, murderers, and apostates might do penance for their offences all their days, and God might hereafter receive them into His favour, but they could never, according to these heretics, be reconciled to the Church; and we learn from Tertullian himself (afterwards, unhappily, perverted to the same heresy), that the early Christians used to represent upon their cups this parable of the Good Shepherd for this very purpose, as a testimony against this extravagant severity. A representation, therefore, which seemed to give to the goat a preference, as it were, even over the sheep, was only a natural adaptation of this parable to illustrate the great Christian doctrine of mercy to the penitent, by interweaving with it that other, more directly bearing on the subject, of the Prodigal Son, in which the returning sinner is welcomed by his Father with the "first robe," and a "ring for his hand and shoes for his feet;" so as even to excite the momentary envy of the blameless elder brother. No one, indeed, who has visited the Catacombs, and made himself acquainted with the unmistakably Christian character of most of the paintings there, knowing too that our Lord was pleased to represent Himself to us under this character of the Good Shepherd, and that the early Christians were, as we have said, in the habit of ornamenting their drinking-cups with this image, can possibly doubt the meaning of this beautiful figure, which meets him at every turn, sometimes rudely engraved on the ordinary gravestones, sometimes painted on the roof or walls of the chapel, sometimes occupying a prominent place in the sculptures of the various sarcophagi, now to be seen in the Christian museums. A shepherd is of course in

itself a natural object, and as such may be painted by Pagans and Christians alike; but it was of the very essence of Christian art to represent natural objects as embodying some hidden spiritual association; and surely no image was more calculated to raise the courage and warm the affections of those who were called upon to live in the shadow of perpetual danger, than that of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

Next to the Good Shepherd, no subjects are more common among the paintings of the Catacombs than those which typify, more or less directly, the great doctrine of the resurrection, or which record some miraculous deliverance from death or imminent danger. Of this last character was the history of the prophet Jonas, every part of which must have been of singular interest and instruction in the first ages of the Church, and which therefore is of frequent recurrence in her cemeteries. The sudden growth of the tree\* which sheltered him from the burning sun, reminded the suffering Christian of the power of God to protect His people in extremity, even, if need were, by miracle; then its sudden withering, and the prophet's lamentation, reminded them of their utter dependence upon God, and warned them to avoid the fault of Jonas, and to hold themselves ready at any moment to exchange mercies for trials.

\* See St. Jerome, Ep. lxxxix., ad S. Aug., et in Comment. Jonas, c. iv. as to the different names given to this tree; the Septuagint having translated it *cucurbita* or gourd, St. Jerome, Aquila, and others *hedera*, or ivy. Ancient Christian paintings and sculptures certainly favour the former interpretation, the fruit of the *cucurbita* being generally to be seen hanging over the head of Jonas from trellis-work, which was, perhaps, meant to represent the booth which the prophet is expressly said to have made for himself on the east side of the city.

Then, again, the prophet was swallowed by a great fish, and thus seemed to have perished for ever; yet the very thing which appeared his ruin, was in truth the means of safety: "What seemed perdition," as S. Austin says, "was in truth safe custody;" and his being thrown forth again upon dry land had been quoted by our Lord himself as a type of His resurrection, and therefore of our own; while it also spoke a general lesson of hope, well fitted to encourage those who were suffering under persecution. These four scenes from the history of Jonas sometimes occupy corresponding compartments on four sides of a chapel; sometimes only two are found; sometimes all is crowded into a single representation; viz., the fish swimming away from the ship, and casting the prophet out of his mouth immediately under the tree. As to the mode in which the details of the subject are treated, it is to be observed that the fish is always represented as a kind of monstrous dragon, with a large head and ears, and a long narrow neck, such as heathen poets and sculptors were wont to describe in the fable of Andromeda; but which also very aptly expresses a common interpretation of the Fathers, that this fish was a figure of the old serpent, by whom death came into the world. This of course involves a different mystical interpretation of the history of Jonas from that which has just been given; but the early Christian writers often used two or more such interpretations of the facts of the old Testament History, according to their need. On the other hand, if we refuse to admit this secondary sense, as I may call it, of the history of Jonas, it is not easy to explain some of the variations which we observe in its representation. In a painting of the cemetery of S. Callixtus, for example, the cross is to be seen rudely but most distinctly executed at one end of the

ship, as though it were its sign or standard ; and we understand this at once, if the ship be taken as a type of the Church, but not otherwise. So, again, the figure of a Christian in prayer appears more than once standing in the same ship from whence Jonas is being expelled ; yet it does not appear that there was really any other worshipper of the true God on board the same ship with the prophet, whom this figure could be intended to represent. It would seem, therefore, that the artist sacrificed historical accuracy to the symbolical expression of some Christian truth ; and this truth, I believe, was sometimes the doctrine of the Resurrection, sometimes the necessity of communion with the Church, or, to speak more correctly, a combination of these truths.

There is not much to remark upon the paintings of Daniel in the lions' den, and the three children in the fiery furnace, both of which are of frequent occurrence in the Catacombs, and, like the history of Jonas, teach a lesson of confidence in God's power and goodness, and are, as it were, shadows of the resurrection of the just. Daniel is always represented in the attitude of prayer—in the ancient attitude, I mean, of Christian prayer ; that is, standing with his hands stretched out in the form of a cross. This form, which, as we learn from the Fathers, was universal among the early Christians, is still retained in some measure by priests in the celebration of mass, by the Capuchins and others in serving mass, and by numbers among the poor everywhere ; and it is worth noticing that S. Gregory Nazianzen expressly speaks of Daniel overcoming the wild beasts by the stretching out of his hands, meaning, of course, by the power of prayer ; but the expression might almost seem to show that S. Gregory himself was familiar with this usual way of representing him. He is

always, as far as I have seen, painted naked ; but the three children in the furnace, on the contrary, in accordance with the Scripture account, are always fully clothed, and in the peculiar costume of the East, the Phrygian caps or tiaras, tunics, and trowsers or *saraballi*.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is another favourite subject, belonging to the same class, and most appropriately represented on the walls of a Christian cemetery. In this picture the door of the tomb appears as the front of a temple, because such was a common form of sepulchres in ancient Rome. Our Lord is generally touching the head of Lazarus with a rod, and Lazarus himself is always wrapped in swaddling-clothes, according to the Gospel narrative.

In other paintings, however, the letter of Scripture is far from being so faithfully attended to. Noë in his ark, for instance, with the dove bringing the olive-branch, is of not unfrequent occurrence ; but, instead of an ark capable of containing Noë and his wife, and his sons, and his sons' wives, and specimens of all living creatures on the face of the earth, we have a small box or chest, in which is standing a man, or sometimes a woman, stretching out the hand to receive the dove. Manifestly the artist had no intention of representing the Scripture narrative as such, but simply as a type of something that was still happening in the Christian Church ; thus, S. Peter, in his epistle, speaks of the Deluge as a type of baptism ; and the ark was, we know, always looked upon by the ancient Christians as typical of the Church, wherein we are saved through the waters of baptism. The dove, too, is the constant emblem of the Holy Spirit, by which we are born again in baptism, and the olive-branch is the recognized token

of peace and reconciliation ; so that the whole representation aptly symbolizes the condition of all Christians, born the enemies of God, but having been by baptism admitted into His Church, and having thus become His friends, and made to be at peace with Him.

Nor is this the only painting found in these cemeteries which has reference to the Sacraments and other ordinances of the Church. On the contrary, as the Catacombs were used not only for the burial of the dead, but also for places of worship and religious instruction of the living, these form, as might have been expected, the subject of a very large and most important class of their paintings. Horace has compared pictures to poems ; the pictures with which we are at present concerned may certainly with still greater justice be compared to sermons, or rather to popular catechetical instructions. They were one continual homily, addressed to the eye as well as to the mind, and setting before both in a figurative but most efficient manner all the principal mysteries of the faith. Each painting was, as it were, a sacrament, according to the ancient definition of that word ; viz., when some past action is so commemorated as that it shall be understood that something else is thereby signified. The events of the Old and New Testaments are the actions here commemorated ; and they stand side by side, intermixed and confronted, as one may say, with one another, in such a manner as to set Christ and His Church before us as the only complete fulfilment of them both. We have the authority of S. Paul for recognizing in every principal incident of Jewish history a type or prophecy of something in the Christian Church ; and as there is this *prophetical* sense hidden under the historical letter of the old

law, so is there a *symbolical* sense under the historical letter of the new,\* and it is only by bearing in mind this very important canon of interpretation of Holy Scripture, that we shall be able thoroughly to comprehend the earliest productions of Christian art. Take, for instance, the paintings in the newly-discovered *cubicula*, close to the burial-place of the Popes, in the Catacomb of S. Callixtus. Speaking generally, we may say that the same series of subjects is repeated with slight variations in each of these chambers; and they are in the following order. First, there is a man striking a rock, from whence flows a copious stream of water; next a man catches fish in this stream; and then he pours some of the water over another, standing before him. These are followed by a feast, wherein seven men, seated at a table, partake of bread and fish; and in two or three instances, another picture is added, in which bread and fish again appear, but under different circumstances, which shall be presently explained. Now, what does all this mean? In the first picture every one will at once recognize Moses striking the rock and giving water to the children of Israel in the wilderness; and we need not multiply words to show how this is symbolical of the faith and grace of Jesus Christ imparted to us through the sacrament of baptism. "The rock is Christ" (1 Cor. x. 2), and "as often as water is mentioned in Holy Scripture," says S. Cyprian, "baptism is preached." The next representation, of a man catching a fish, immediately brings to our mind our Lord's words with reference to the Apostolic function of fishing for men (Luke v. 10); and, indeed, many of the early

\* See this argument ably drawn out, with reference to the miracles and other actions of our Lord, in Card. Wiseman's Essays, vol. iii.

Greek Fathers, as S. Cyril, S. Basil, S. Gregory Nazianzen, and others, speak of our Lord Himself under the same figure, as seeking to catch fish from amid the bitter and unstable waters of this world, not that He may put them to death, but that He may impart to them new life. And how is this new life given? In the laver of regeneration, through the life-giving waters of baptism; as Tertullian says, "we are little fish, born in water and only saved through its agency." And accordingly the next scene in our picture represents the act of baptizing.

This same truth is expressed in a somewhat different manner in one of the old Mosaics at Ravenna. Instead of two separate figures of a man and a fish, there is but one figure, half man, half fish,—*non totus homo*, as the legend says, *sed piscis ab imo*. The painting in the Catacomb is more simple and more expressive; we have first an event of Old Testament history, *prophetical* of holy baptism; next an ordinary human action *symbolical* of it, and, lastly, the literal act itself.

The two other pictures which, as we have said, are found in immediate connection with these, preach with no less distinctness the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. In these the fish no longer represents an ordinary Christian, but Jesus Christ Himself, according to the universal teaching of the early Fathers. Tertullian, S. Jerome, S. Optatus, S. Augustin, Eusebius, and others, speak of our Lord under this figure; deriving it from the titles which are given to Him in the famous acrostic verses of the sibyl as quoted by the last two writers.\* The initial letters of those titles make up the Greek word

\* S. Aug. de Civ. Dei, xviii. 23; Euseb. in Orat. Const. c. 18.



ΙΧΘΥΣ, or fish ;\* and accordingly, in every story of Sacred Writ connected with a fish, the early Church recognized some figure of our Lord. "He is *our* fish," says Tertullian—"who by His descent, when we call upon Him, into the baptismal font, causes that which before was water to be now called *piscina*," says S. Optatus (*a pisce piscina*). "He is the fish," says S. Jerome, "in whose mouth is found the tax, or tribute-money, to be paid to those who demand it, whereby alone Peter and all other sinners can be redeemed." Finally, "He is that fish," says S. Optatus again, "whom Tobias seized in the river Tigris, whose flesh was good for food, whose liver drove away the devil from his wife Sara, and whose gall restored sight to his aged father." "Even so we," say S. Prosper and S. Augustin, "are daily fed and illuminated by Jesus Christ." Accordingly, it is with especial reference to the Christian's privilege of feeding upon his Lord in the Holy Eucharist, that this symbol of the fish is most frequently used both by Christian writers and artists. A Greek sepulchral inscription of the greatest antiquity bids us "receive the sweet food of the Saviour of the Saints, taking into our hands *the fish* ;" S. Austin, in his Confessions, describes the Eucharistic feast as that solemnity "in which *that fish* is set before us, which, drawn forth from the deep, becomes the food of pious mortals ;" and the "*piscis assus*," or broiled fish, of the Gospels, wherewith our Lord fed seven of His Apostles by the sea of Tiberias (John, xxi. 13), is always by the Fathers held to be mystically significant of "*Christus passus*." "Our Lord," says S. Austin, commenting on this passage, "made a

\* Ιησους Χριστος, Θεου Υιος, Σωτηρ—Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.

feast for these seven disciples of the fish which they saw laid on the hot coals, and of bread. The broiled fish is Christ; He, too, is that bread which came down from heaven; and in Him the Church is incorporated for the enjoyment of everlasting happiness, that we all who have this hope may communicate in so great a sacrament, and share in the same bliss." Fish and bread, therefore, when taken together, furnish a very proper secret representation of the Holy Eucharist; the one denoting its outward and seeming form, the other its inward and hidden reality; and any occasion on which our Lord distributed those two kinds of food together could not fail to bring that adorable mystery before the minds of the faithful.

Bearing this in mind, let us return to our paintings in the subterranean chambers of S. Callisto. We have said that in each chamber, after the paintings which represent Holy Baptism, we see seven men seated at a table, eating fish and bread; surely it is impossible to doubt but that this is the feast recorded by S. John as being "the third time that Jesus was manifested to His disciples after He was risen from the dead," when He came "and took bread and gave them, and fish in like manner." But still further; as the sacrament of Baptism was represented first symbolically, then literally, so here, too, side by side with this symbolical feast, is to be seen, in one place a three-legged table (reminding us of the mystical *tripos*) with two loaves and a fish placed upon it; and in another the same table with a single loaf and a fish, over which a priest is stretching forth his hands for the purpose of blessing; while on the opposite side stands a woman with uplifted hands, in the attitude of prayer. It may be doubted whether this figure were intended to represent the Church, or only the particular individual buried in an adjacent grave;

but we cannot doubt that the whole picture refers to the consecration of the Holy Eucharist.

In another *cubiculum*, in a distant part of the same cemetery, or rather in the adjoining cemetery of S. Cornelius, and not very far from the tomb of that pontiff, the bread and fish may be seen in a different combination, but with the same meaning. A fish, bearing on its back a basket of bread, appears twice repeated, as a kind of ornament on either side of one of the principal paintings on the walls. The bread is not of the ordinary kind,—in small loaves, *decussati*, as they were called, *i.e.* divided into four equal parts by two cross lines,—but of the kind known among the Romans by the barbarous name of “*mamphala*,” a bread of a gray ashen colour, which was used by the people of the East, especially the Jews, as an offering of the first-fruits to the priests, and was therefore considered sacred. Within the basket, too, may be clearly distinguished a glass full of red wine; so that the whole painting brings forcibly to our recollection the description given by S. Jerome of a bishop’s treasures,—“*Corpus Domini in canistro vimineo*” (for the basket in the painting is precisely of this character, made of osier-twigs), “*et sanguis Ejus in vitro.*”—“The Body of our Lord in an osier basket, and His Blood in glass.”

It is obvious to remark that the miraculous feeding of the multitude with a few loaves and fishes is capable of the same mystical interpretation; and, in fact, it is much insisted on by Christian writers as a figure of the Holy Eucharist; and the changing of the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana, is also, under another aspect, a still more lively memorial of the same sublime mystery; for, to use the words of S. Cyril, “since He once changed water into wine, which is akin to blood, shall we refuse to

believe Him when he changes wine into blood?" Both these miracles, therefore, are of very frequent recurrence in early Christian art; the former more commonly in the paintings of the cemeteries, the latter in the sculptured sarcophagi, and on the gold-enamelled glasses of which we shall have occasion to speak by-and-by. At present I would only make one important observation, that, whereas the Scripture narrative distinctly tells us that there were but six waterpots of stone, these glasses\* invariably represent seven. It is impossible that this uniform departure from the letter of Holy Scripture should be the result of accident; it must have some hidden meaning with reference to the number seven; as the seven sacraments for example, of which the Holy Eucharist is the crown or perfection; or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; or, as I think more probable, it was intended to allude to the seven loaves and the seven baskets of fragments in one of the miraculous feedings of the multitude; and so to represent both those miracles, as it were, at once.

Between the two sets of paintings which we have described in the *cubicula* of S. Callisto, as representing Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, there is introduced, in one instance, the figure of the paralytic carrying his bed upon his shoulders; and a reference to the circumstances of that miracle, and the language used by our Lord on the occasion, sufficiently explains its mystical meaning. The palsied body of the sufferer was, to Him who saw both body and soul, only a lively image of a soul palsied by sin; and accordingly, instead of speaking first of his bodily ailments, He at once said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are

\* In the sculptures, two, three, or four are given, according to the space.

forgiven thee ;” at which, when the Pharisees murmured, He proceeded to show them, by the miracle of healing, that “ the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins.”\* Now, if we connect this saying of our Lord with that other (John xx. 23) in which He delegated this same power to his Apostles, we shall see that this miracle afforded a lively image to the faithful of the “ power ” which yet remained “ on earth to forgive sins ;” namely, in the holy sacrament of Penance. And that this is the sense in which it was actually used is clear, from a painting in the Catacomb of S. Hermes, where, in immediate connection with it, is the administration of that sacrament represented literally, in the form of a person kneeling before another who seems to be giving him absolution—a strange subject to find painted in these cemeteries, unless we may suppose it to have been upon the tomb of some miserable *lapsed* one, or some other notorious sinner or heretic, whose reconciliation to the Church had been publicly accomplished shortly before his death. Moreover, I do not remember that any other of the miracles of Christ, besides those few which have now been mentioned, is anywhere represented throughout the Catacombs ; so that we may be sure each one was chosen for the sake of some mystical signification peculiar to itself, and not merely for that which it had in common with all the rest ; viz., that it was a proof of the divine Omnipotence of Him who wrought them.

Among the subjects from the Old Testament history of which we have not yet spoken, those most worthy of remark are the fall of man,—represented by our first parents standing on either side of a tree

\* See St. Luke v. 20—24.

laden with fruit, round the trunk of which the old serpent is entwined,—and the faithful obedience of Abraham preparing to offer up his son Isaac. These two subjects, in immediate juxtaposition, seem to set before us the two doctrines of original sin and of the sacrifice of the true Isaac, whereby our redemption from all sin was to be accomplished. Elsewhere, the offering of Isaac, and the sacrifice of the ram in his stead, are introduced in another series of paintings, as typical of the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist.

We have already spoken of the pictures of Moses striking the rock; he is also often represented in the act of taking his shoe from off his foot, with a hand coming out of a cloud, as it were of God calling him up into the mountain; a scene which is understood by some only to teach a lesson of reverence in holy places, and of general docility and obedience whenever God speaks to us; whilst, according to others, it is a symbolical foreshadowing of the Prince of the Apostles, called, like Moses, to receive the law, and to be its chief promulgator, judge, and interpreter. Without pretending absolutely to reject either of these opinions, we may observe that both Christian writers and Christian artists of the first ages undoubtedly looked upon Moses as a type of Peter; that is to say, they considered that the position and privileges of S. Peter under the new law were somewhat analogous to those of Moses under the old. Hence he is called by Prudentius *dux novi Israel*,—the leader of the new Israel. In one of the painted glasses found in the Catacombs, and which represents the scene of Moses striking the rock, the name of the person striking is distinctly inscribed, not Moses, but *Petrus*; and in several of the carved sarcophagi of the fourth and fifth centuries, to be seen in the Museum of Christian

Art at the Lateran Palace, the same event is carved in bas-relief, not among the actions of Moses, but of Peter.

The adoration of our Lord by the wise men from the East,—or rather their call to Him, for they are never found prostrate, or even kneeling,—is another subject of sufficiently frequent recurrence in the paintings of the Catacombs; and we can easily appreciate its value to the early Christians in Rome, both as an expression of thankfulness, inasmuch as they themselves, mostly Gentiles, had been called, like these Magi, to the knowledge of our Lord, and also as an earnest that the whole Gentile world, even their heathen persecutors—for whom we cannot doubt that, following their Master's example, they prayed continually—would one day be brought in like manner to His feet. The Wise Men are commonly represented as offering their gifts to our Lord as He sits in His Mother's lap, she herself being also seated. Once or twice they are standing before Herod, with the star over their heads. The number of the Magi is not always uniform, but we see sometimes three, sometimes two, and sometimes even four; but, in these last instances, they are always standing one or two on either side of our Lady; so that the numbers may, not improbably, have been chosen only for the sake of order and regularity in the painting. A very ancient apocryphal tradition, mentioned by S. Augustin and S. Chrysostom, makes them twelve in number; but S. Leo the Great, S. Bede, and the Church generally, celebrate three, as being at least the heads and leaders of the rest. Three also are represented in the mosaics of S. Mary Major's, of the age of Pope Sixtus III. (A.D. 432), and in other still more ancient monuments.

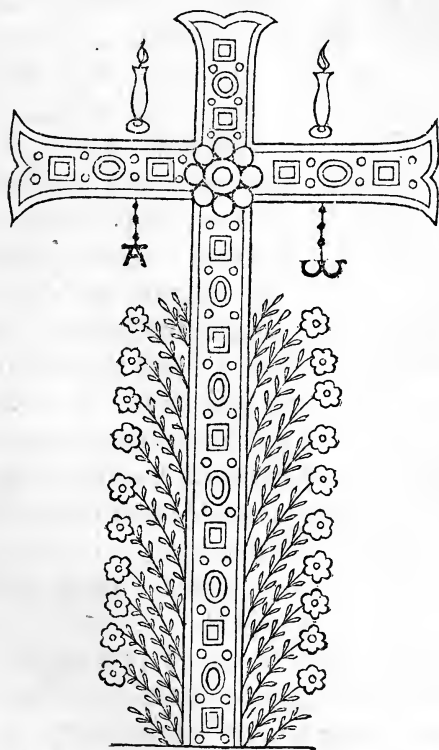
Only occasionally may be seen paintings of subjects

not taken from the Bible ; as, for instance, of single individuals, the martyrs or others buried in the adjacent graves. These are painted with the utmost simplicity, and always with the arms outstretched, in the attitude of prayer. Sometimes the names are painted over their heads, as in a chapel in S. Callisto, where, on the wall over a double *arcosolium*, are five figures,—two women and three men, each with the name and the usual formula “*in pace*,” evidently of very early date, for they have no *nimbus* ; and, moreover, two or three of them have been cut through, in order to make graves as near as possible to the altar, that is, to the martyr’s tomb. And again, in two or three *cubicula* we find paintings of Orpheus playing on his lyre, and charming therewith the birds and the beasts of the forest. It has excited some surprise to find this Pagan figure where all the other pictures are so exclusively Christian ; but Orpheus, like the Sibyls, held a kind of exceptional position in Paganism, being said, like them, by the ancient Fathers of the Church, to have prophesied many things truly of our Lord ; and we know how common it has been on this account to represent the Sibyls in Christian churches, as in the Ara Coeli and S. Agostino in Rome, at Loretto, and on the beautifully carved pavement in the cathedral of Sienna, to say nothing of Michael Angelo’s celebrated ceiling in the Sistine chapel. Moreover, Orpheus attracting the birds and beasts, nay, the very rocks and trees, by the music of his lyre, was often quoted as, in some sort, a type of our Lord, who by the gracious words that flowed from His lips softened the hard hearts of sinners, and brought together into one fold a people drawn from among all the nations of the world.

Other paintings, of more rare occurrence, are also



of more doubtful, or, at least, more difficult explanation ; and to examine them at length would carry us beyond the limits assigned to our present volume. We shall probably have opportunities of describing some of them when we come to speak of the contents of each catacomb in particular ; and, at any rate, enough has now been said to enable our readers to form a correct idea of the general character of the paintings, and a correct estimate of their value and importance.



## CHAPTER V.

### SCULPTURE OF THE CATACOMBS.



THAT has been said of the jealous watchfulness of the early Christians with reference to the use of painting, is of course equally true with reference to the sister art of sculpture. There was another hinderance, also, to the general use of sculpture during the first ages ; viz., the difficulty of executing it under the actual circumstances of the Church at that time. A Christian artist might decorate the chambers or galleries of a catacomb with paintings, and none but those who entered there need ever know it ; but heavy blocks of marble cannot so easily be transported from one place to another without observation ; nor did the secret entrances and narrow passages of a catacomb offer any convenience either for receiving or retaining them. Accordingly, Christian sculpture as an art cannot be said to have had any existence before the conversion of Constantine. Its earliest efforts, however, are too nearly allied with the paintings of the Catacombs to allow us to pass them over altogether without mention.

Even during the times of persecution, some few persons, probably martyrs or persons of distinction in some other way, were buried in large marble sarcophagi placed within the Catacombs ; but these appear upon examination not to have been executed by Christian artists, but rather to have been chosen

out of the collection of some heathen sculptor, as having on them either representations of merely natural and innocent objects, such as cattle, birds, the four seasons, &c., or else representations of some of those fables of Pagan mythology which were most easily capable of receiving a Christian interpretation. As soon as the Church was freed from those trammels of fear and secrecy by which she was so long kept in bondage, she began to use the art of sculpture as subservient to her holy purposes, just as she used also every other art and science that was not in itself sinful ; and the sculptor reproduced in stone or marble what in earlier ages had been always painted. There are some additions, however, very worthy of note, as marking an extension of the range of subjects upon which Christian art ventured to exercise itself in the fourth and fifth centuries, to which date most of the Christian sarcophagi must be assigned. The Holy Trinity, for example, is nowhere represented, I think, in the paintings of the Catacombs, whereas it is not at all uncommon in sculpture ; and three or four examples may be seen in the collection of sarcophagi at the Lateran Museum. Our Lord giving sight to the blind, raising the dead child to life, and changing the water into wine ; the woman touching the hem of His garment ; His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and two or three scenes from His Passion, will also strike the careful student as additions to the usual range of subjects exhibited in the earliest paintings.

Father Garrucci, S. J., is preparing for publication a complete account of all the Christian sarcophagi that have yet been discovered, belonging to the first six centuries. They are upwards of five hundred in number ; of course we can only attempt to mention a few of the most remarkable, selecting our specimens

from among those which may still be seen in Rome. Amongst these, that of Junius Bassus, now in the subterranean of S. Peter's, deserves the first place. It was discovered very near its present site in the year 1595, and must have been placed originally either in one of the subterranean chambers of the cemetery on the Vatican hill, or in the portico of the first Constantinian Basilica of S. Peter. Its legend runs thus :—

JVN. BASSVS VC. QVI VIXIT ANNIS XLII.  
MEN. II. IN IPSA PRÆFECTVRA VRBIS  
NEOFITVS IIT AD DEVM. VIII. KAL. SEPT.  
EVSEBIO ET YPATIO COSS.

“Junius Bassus, who lived forty-two years and two months. In the very year in which he was prefect of the city, he went to God, a neophyte, on the 23rd of August, A.D. 359.”

In the double row of sculptured figures which adorn the front, everybody will at once recognize Adam and Eve, Abraham offering his son, and Daniel between the lions; and the other subjects, though less familiar, are not much more difficult to decipher. In the centre, our Lord is seated on a throne giving the law to His apostles, SS. Peter and Paul, just as we see Him on the glasses of the Catacombs, in the mosaics of Sta. Costanza, and in other monuments of the same epoch; and in the two compartments on the left are represented His apprehension by the soldiers, and Pilate perplexed and doubtful, about to wash his hands, in protestation of his own innocence. In the centre of the lower row is our Lord entering into Jerusalem, the children of Israel spreading their garments in the way; and at either end is Job comforted by his friends, and S. Peter apprehended by the Jews. In either row

the subjects are arranged under a series of arches ; and not the least interesting part of the monument are the figures with which the small space over the columns of these arches is ornamented. They are the same miracles which we have already seen so often repeated ; only the person performing them is here represented as a lamb. A lamb strikes the rock with a rod, and the waters flow out ; a lamb touches Lazarus with the same rod, to raise him from the dead ; the lamb also multiplies the loaves and fishes ; and, lastly, he touches the head of a smaller lamb, upon whom rays of light, or streams of grace, are descending from a dove which appears immediately above. There can be but little doubt, I think, that in this last scene the sacrament of Confirmation is intended, as the perfection or consummation, as it was called, of the sacrament of Baptism ; but it is to the rod here held in the foot of the lamb that we would especially invite the attention of our readers. We have already seen how continually our Lord is represented in these old paintings and sculptures, as bearing in His hands this symbol of royal authority, and touching with it the object on which His divine wonder-working power is about to be exercised ; but there is another scene of frequent recurrence in these ancient sarcophagi, in which our Lord seems to transfer the rod to S. Peter, as the Prince of the Apostles. After the representation of different miracles in which He bears the rod in His own hand, there follows the scene in which He appears without it, and S. Peter stands by His side, holding the rod with one hand, whilst the other is raised to his lips, and a cock stands at his feet, in remembrance of his threefold denial of Christ—the pledge and token, as the early Fathers tell us, of the acceptance of all true penitents, no less than of the

innocent and upright, into the kingdom of heaven. In a sarcophagus in the Lateran Museum,\* this scene occupies the central place,—indeed, is the only one represented, the remainder of the front being only ornamented by that wavy, or curvilinear pattern, so common both in Pagan and Christian monuments. More frequently, however, it is followed by two other scenes, which, when taken together, appear to contain a sort of epitome of the history of the Church. S. Peter, having received the Divine commission, proceeds to preach the Gospel, to strike the rock whence fountains of living water are to spring forth for the refreshment and regeneration of mankind. Some accept the invitation, and drink eagerly of the waters of life, whilst others, on the contrary, not only do not avail themselves of the invitation, but also persecute him who gives it. This was the result of the first apostolic preaching, and has been repeated ever since; and hence the striking of the rock†, and the apprehension of S. Peter follow, as we have said, immediately after his reception of the rod. These three subjects may be seen together in five or six of the sarcophagi, placed in the Christian Museum at the Lateran Palace, and still more frequently, of course, in any published collection of similar monuments; and I do not know of any other probable or consistent interpretation which can be given of them, and of the place which they generally occupy in the Christian sculpture of the fourth and fifth centuries.

Another subject, supposed to have reference to the

\* It is the seventh on the left-hand side, as we go up the gallery.

† Our readers will remember what has been mentioned before, that in an ancient Christian glass the name of *Petrus* is written over the figure who strikes the rock.

same portion of Christian truth, is the ascent of Elias into heaven and leaving his mantle to Eliseus. This scene is painted in a chapel of the Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, and sculptured on some three or four sarcophagi, one of which may be seen in S. Peter's, under an altar near the sacristy door; and a fragment of another is inserted in the wall facing us as we ascend the second staircase in the Lateran Museum. Its meaning can only be understood by a reference to the usages of antiquity, both sacred and profane. We read in the lives of the old Pagan philosophers, that their scholars gloried in adopting the dress as well as the principles of their masters; even Romans themselves did not disdain to exchange the national *toga* for the *pallium* of their Grecian instructors. But the mantle that had been worn by any of those teachers themselves became the object of special veneration; it was looked upon as a sort of type or representation of the teacher himself, and he who wore it was considered as heir of his spirit, and his most legitimate successor. What we read in the Old Testament concerning the mantle of Elias, and in ecclesiastical history concerning the cloaks of certain great saints, and especially of the Apostolic founders of churches, and what we see at the present day in the use of the pall, are only different illustrations, or examples, of the same principle. When Elias had been commanded by God to anoint Eliseus to be prophet in his stead,\* we read that he went and found Eliseus ploughing, and when Elias came up to him, he cast his mantle upon him. And forthwith he left the oxen and ran after Elias, and said, "I will follow thee." And he said, "That which was my part, I have done to thee." He had been told

\* 3 Kings xix. 16.

to anoint Eliseus to be prophet in his room, and he now says that he has done this; he has done it by casting his mantle upon him. By-and-by Elias is caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, in the presence of Eliseus; and Eliseus takes up the mantle of Elias that fell from him, and returning to the river Jordan, he strikes the waters with the mantle, and after he has called upon the name of God, the waters were divided hither and thither,\* and Eliseus passed over. And the sons of the prophets seeing it said, "The spirit of Elias hath rested upon Eliseus." Thus, it was by the mantle of Elias that Eliseus was first inaugurated prophet, and by the same mantle that he received "his double spirit," according to the promise that had been made him, and was recognized as his legitimate successor. Even so in the Christian Church, the *pallium* or mantle of S. Mark was handed on from one bishop to another as they successively occupied the chair of that Evangelist in Alexandria; and as the old writers tell us, *tunc legitime sedet*,—then a man is considered lawfully to have succeeded, when he has removed this mantle from off the neck of his deceased predecessor and placed it on his own. Traces of the same practice are to be found in the history of the Churches of Constantinople, and, above all in the Church of Rome. The *pallium* which is worn by the Popes and by those patriarchs and archbishops to whom the Popes may send it, has from the earliest times been considered as the special type or symbol of the fulness of authority derived from the Prince of the Apostles. When the newly-elected Pope receives it from the hands of the archdeacon in the ceremony of his consecration at the shrine of S. Peter, the investiture is accompanied by these words, "Receive

\* 4 Kings ii. 12—15.



the *pallium*, to wit, the fulness of the Apostolic office." When he himself blesses other *pallia*, it is at the same place, and on the day of S. Peter's martyrdom, that it is done; there, also, they rest until they are sent to those whose privilege it is to receive them; so that they are still, as always, said to be sent from the body of S. Peter,—*de corpore Sancti Petri*; and those who receive them (as we read of our own S. Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury, and of those who were present at his inauguration) kiss them, and treat them with reverence, *in obsequium Petri*,—in token of obedience and devotion to S. Peter. But whence did S. Peter himself receive it? Whose successor and representative was he? The kingdom which he established upon earth was none of his making; he cannot claim to be considered as the original founder of that dynasty which yet rules in the Holy See. He only received the keys of the kingdom from Him who was its true founder; and He it is, therefore, Who, in the paintings and carvings of early Christian art, is supposed to be the young man who leaves His mantle to Peter as he ascends into heaven; and Peter, deeming himself unworthy of so precious and holy a deposit, does not dare to receive it with uncovered hands, but holds them forth only under the covering of his own mantle. According to this interpretation,—and I do not know of any other which at all accounts for the selection of this subject from Old Testament history,—the early Christians intended to symbolize by this representation that the jurisdiction and authority of Christ had been conferred upon Peter, from whom it was to be perpetually transmitted to his legitimate successors.

We have said enough of the specimens of ancient Christian sculpture given us by the Basilica of S. Peter's; let us turn next to S. Paul's. The very

large and handsome sarcophagus which greets us as soon as we enter the Christian museum at the Lateran Palace, standing at the very end of the gallery, before we ascend the steps, was found in the basilica of S. Paul, on the Ostian Way, precisely over the Apostle's tomb; whence it became necessary to remove it, in order to provide a proper foundation for those magnificent pillars of Oriental alabaster which support the modern Baldacchino. It must have been placed there at the time of the rebuilding of that basilica by Theodosius, in the latter part of the fourth century, and was never really completed. Of the busts which occupy the centre compartment of the upper division, and which were of course intended to be portraits of the man and his wife for whose burial the sarcophagus was provided, nothing but the mere outline has been chiselled; and other heads, behind and between the principal figures, are in the same unfinished condition. The main subjects, however, are probably as highly wrought as they were ever intended to be; and, whatever may be thought of the artistic merits of their execution, they certainly present a very interesting series of Scripture histories for the meditation of the Christian student. First, we have the creation of man: God the Son, "by whom all things were made," has just created Eve out of the side of Adam, who lies asleep at his feet; and He presents her to God the Father, seated on His throne, who "blesses" her, whilst the Third Person of the ever adorable Trinity stands behind, with his hand resting upon the throne. But immediately after the creation followed sin, and with the fall came also the promise of a Redeemer. This, therefore, forms the subject of the next group. God the Son now appears, no longer as "the Ancient of days," according to His Divine

Nature in which He "was with God from the beginning;" but according to the mystery of His Incarnation, a young man, the same as is repeated presently, working various miracles. First he stands between Adam and Eve, awarding to each some portion of the punishment that was due to them for their sin; viz., the punishment of labour: to Adam He gives a wheatsheaf, in token that he was to till the ground, and to Eve a lamb, the spinning of whose wool was hereafter to be the employment of her daughters. The unfinished busts already spoken of separate these Old Testament histories from those which follow, taken from the New; viz., the changing of water into wine, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the resurrection of Lazarus, in which last scene is added the figure of one of his sisters kneeling at our Lord's feet, as though petitioning for the miracle that was wrought. The subjects of the lower division begin with the Adoration of our Blessed Lord by the three Magi, bearing their gifts in their hands; and it is observable that the chair or throne on which our Lady sits seems to be the same as that in which the Eternal Father is represented above, excepting that it is without any covering, and that the Holy Spirit stands behind it in the same attitude as He stands above. This of course must be intended to denote that "that which was born of her was of the Holy Ghost," and that the child, sitting on her knees was He to whom the kings of Arabia and Saba should bring gifts. Next follows a miracle of our Lord,—giving sight to the blind; that miracle which typifies so aptly our natural condition, and the illumination which we receive by the gift of faith in baptism. In the centre, immediately under the busts, is Daniel between the lions, with the Holy Spirit on one side, and on the other Habacuc brought by the

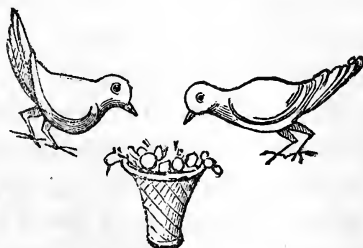
hair of his head, and carrying the bread which he had broken, and which was now to serve for the prophet's sustenance. We can hardly be mistaken in supposing this to be symbolical of the true bread which had been the sufficient support of Christians amidst the fiery persecutions through which they had passed, and which was intended in like manner to strengthen all Christians in their pilgrimage through life, and more especially on their last journey through the valley of the shadow of death.

It will probably attract the attention of our Protestant readers that the scene here represented is one with which they are not familiar, for it is taken from that portion of Scripture which they call apocryphal ; nevertheless, it is to be found in nearly all the sculptured representations of Daniel ; and other sepulchral monuments of the same date represent other histories taken from the same source ; the history of Bel and the Dragon, for example, and that of Susanna and the Elders. The former appears in the front of two or three sarcophagi in the Lateran Museum, in the person of Daniel offering a cake of some kind to a dragon, before whom an altar has been overthrown ; and the latter is represented allegorically in a painting in the cemetery of Pretextatus, of a lamb standing between two wolves or foxes ; over the lamb is written *Susanna*, and over the other animals *senioris*, i.e. *seniores*, or elders. The remaining subjects of this sarcophagus are those from the life of S. Peter, which have been already explained. It would take us too long to make the circuit of all the catacombs with their adjacent Basilicas, and to describe the various sculptured monuments which have been found in them. The small collection of sarcophagi placed in the Lateran Museum forms a very fair sample of the whole ; and those who have followed us through our

description of the paintings, and the two or three principal monuments already spoken of, will have but little difficulty in interpreting any other. Jonas, Noe and his ark, Daniel, and the three children in the fiery furnace, are continually repeated. Representations of the Holy Trinity occur occasionally, with Cain and Abel bringing their respective gifts; the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, and the ram to be substituted for him; the woman touching the hem of our Lord's garment; His triumphant entry into Jerusalem; and, in some instances, different scenes from His Passion. Even here, however, these last are not represented literally, but under a certain veil of secrecy; for instance it is not our Blessed Lord, but some other, who bears the cross; the crown which is being placed on His head is of flowers rather than of thorns, and corresponds better to the mystical language of the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles,\* "the diadem wherewith His mother crowned Him in the day of His espousals," than to the simple truth of the Gospel narrative: "And plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head." The Labarum of Constantine generally appears in the centre of these monuments, with two birds pecking at the wreath of flowers by which it is encircled, emblems of Christian souls tasting the sweetness of eternal bliss; whilst two soldiers sit beneath it, the one in an attitude of wakeful vigilance, the other asleep: types of other Christian souls, who are still in their state of trial, not having yet entered into their rest.

The statue of S. Hippolytus, lately removed from the Vatican library to the museum at the Lateran, is spoken of by Winckelmann and other critics as the finest specimen of ancient Christian sculpture in

existence, and must probably be considered as a contemporary work, or at least not long posterior to his age ; *i. e.*, not much later than the third century. It was discovered in the course of making some excavations at the back of *San Lorenzo fuori le Mura*, and must have been placed originally, if not in the Catacombs themselves, in some church built in immediate connection with them. The famous Paschal cycle, however, which is inscribed on one side of his chair, and the list of his works inscribed upon the other, are monuments for the study of the learned, and cannot be explained here : for we have only desired to give our readers a general idea of the characteristics of ancient Christian sculpture when applied to the adornment of tombs ; not to enter into the subjects so fully as to supersede the necessity of a study of the monuments themselves.



## CHAPTER VI.

VISIT TO THE CATACOMBS OF S. AGNES AND  
S. ALEXANDER, ON THE VIA NONENTANA.



ANY modern writers upon the Catacombs dissuade their readers from attempting to make any personal inspection of them: some, like Dr. Maitland, represent it as difficult and dangerous; others, like Raoul-Rochette, as useless; books and museums being, in his opinion, far better instructors. We, on the contrary, desire most strenuously to maintain that nothing will supply the place of a personal visit for those who wish really to understand anything of the subject, even in a merely popular way; and as to the dangers attending such a visit, they are purely imaginary. There is no bad air, and very little dampness; neither is there any cause, in those Catacombs that are usually visited, to fear a sudden giving way of the soil; and, as you cannot gain admittance without being accompanied by one of the regularly-appointed guides, to whom, in ordinary prudence, all visitors keep pretty close, there is little or no peril of any losing their way.

These guides being themselves labourers employed in excavating the Catacombs, and these labourers being few in number, and only able to work there for six or seven months in the year, it is not permitted to withdraw them from their work in the week. It is only on Sundays, therefore, and other

holidays of obligation, that the Catacombs can be visited by strangers ; and, in order to secure the presence of the guide, it is necessary to procure a ticket from the Cardinal Vicar, on which is specified the particular cemetery it is desired to visit, and the hour ; as also that the number of the party must not exceed eight, and that they must provide themselves, before leaving the city, with candles, or (what is much better) with the small twisted taper called *cerino*. Having obtained this ticket, the visitors have only to find themselves at the appointed place at the hour fixed, and the *custode* will be there to meet them.

Of course these *custodi*, being mere labourers, are not able to explain things, and the object of the following chapters is simply to enable visitors to know what to ask for, and to understand when they see it. To describe all that is to be seen in each catacomb would be a long and difficult task ; it will be sufficient for the purpose at which this little volume aims, —which is merely to assist the many,—if we point out the principal objects of interest, and the order in which they occur. Those who wish to make a regular study of the Catacombs must, of course, carry on their researches on a different scale ; but for people in general, a very fair idea of them may be gathered by visiting those of S. Agnes, S. Alexander, and S. Callixtus. If it is desired to extend these visits, we would add the Catacombs of SS. Nereus and Achilles, Sta. Priscilla, S. Peter and S. Marcellinus, and S. Pontianus ; or if, on the contrary, there is only time for one, let S. Agnes or S. Callixtus be chosen ; it really scarcely matters which, for it is difficult to say which of the two is the more interesting, though, as will presently appear, their points of interest are of a very different character.



Above all things, however, let visitors beware of going to the catacombs which are entered from the church of S. Sebastian, and then thinking that they have seen enough to form a fair idea of the Roman Catacombs. These are very tempting, as being always open; that is, a *frate* in the adjoining monastery is always ready to act as guide, and it needs no ticket, and none of those previous arrangements which in the busy sight-seeing life of a Roman winter are often so troublesome; nevertheless it ought distinctly to be understood that, though future excavations may bring to light much that is interesting in this cemetery, the small portion now accessible is, as a specimen of the Catacombs, utterly without value. Its principal interest consists in its religious associations: here S. Bridget was wont to kneel, rapt in contemplation; here S. Charles Borromeo spent whole nights in prayer; and here the heart of S. Philip Neri was so inflamed with divine love as to cause his very bodily frame to be changed. And all this happened here rather than elsewhere in the Catacombs, because the neighbourhood of the monastery caused this cemetery never to be lost sight of. In the days of the saints we have mentioned, it was the only one accessible; but, for that very reason, because it has been more easily entered, it has suffered even more than others from the devastations of careless, curious, or greedy visitors.

If, then, we desire to gain a real knowledge of the Catacombs, we must, for the present at least, turn away from S. Sebastian; and we had better proceed through the Porta Pia, on the opposite side of the city, to the Catacombs of S. Agnes. It is not necessary that we should discuss the genuineness or spuriousness of the Acts of this Saint's martyrdom, attributed to S. Ambrose. The general facts of her

history are beyond dispute ; her refusal to accept as her husband the son of the prefect of the city, her exposure to public insult on the spot still shown in the subterranean vault of the church of S. Agnese in the Piazza Navona, her miraculous preservation from shame, her subsequent torture and death, and lastly her burial, by some of her relations, in a vineyard about a mile outside the city walls, on the Via Nomentana. It is over her tomb that Constantine built the church of *S. Agnese fuori le Mura*, at the request of his sister Constantia, who had received a miraculous cure through the intercession of the saint ;\* and it is said that from those early days a college, or convent, of sacred Virgins was established in this place, amongst whom Constantia herself lived and died. Constantine built also a large circular tomb, or *mausoleum*, for his daughter within the same inclosure as the Basilica of S. Agnes, and it still remains as the church of Sta. Costanza, having been consecrated by Pope Alexander IV. in the thirteenth century. It is to be regretted, however, that the magnificent sarcophagus of porphyry in which her body was placed, has been removed to the museum at the Vatican.

The long flight of steps which descend to the church of S. Agnes warns us of the neighbourhood of a subterranean cemetery ; and when the church was restored and modernized, at the end of the sixteenth century, the galleries of the catacomb were laid open in many places. At present, however,

\* Prudentius bears testimony to the power of her intercession (Hymn 14) :—

Conspectu in ipso condita turrium,  
Servat salutem Virgo Quiritium ;  
Necnon et ipsos protegit advenas  
Puro ac fideli pectore supplices.

these entrances are closed ; and in order to get into the catacomb, we must pursue our way along the Via Nomentana somewhat further, to a vineyard on the left-hand side of the road, from which we descend by a staircase, which was constructed, probably in the age of Constantine, for the use of the pilgrims who at that time crowded to visit the tombs of the martyrs. That it was not the original entrance used in times of persecution, is clear, both from its position so near the high road,—for the old Via Nomentana ran even nearer to it than the modern one does,—and also from the fact that, where it breaks into the gallery, it destroys graves that had already been made ; and in truth, if we advance but a few yards along one of the narrow passages which lead into the interior, we may still read an inscription scratched in the mortar round one of the graves, which gives us the precise date of this portion of the cemetery :—ABVNDANTIA IN PACE TVRB-  
ANTIA IN PACE KAL IVNII NEPOTIANO  
ET FACVNDOS COSS,—*i. e.*, A.D. 336.

Other parts of the cemetery are undoubtedly much more ancient, and, before we take our leave of it, we shall see the original entrance itself, which is probably older than even the time of S. Agnes. For we must beware of supposing that, because the cemetery bears the name of S. Agnes, it must therefore necessarily follow that it was first executed in her time ; the names of the Catacombs are by no means a safe criterion whereby to judge of their relative antiquity. Some of them, it is true, were made in the days of the saint whose name they bear ; thus, the Catacomb of S. Helen, on the Via Tiburtina, was not excavated until the time of that empress, the mother of Constantine ; while there is no reason to doubt the Catacomb of S. Priscilla dates from as

remote a period as the time of that saint (the mother of Pudens, on whose property it is said to have been dug) ; that is, as the apostolic age itself. The same may be said of the Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, which, as seems now certain, also belonged to the apostolic age. But, on the other hand, the cemetery of S. Callixtus is of far older date than his pontificate ; since we read of martyrs being buried there fifty or sixty years before his time. He only enlarged and adorned a cemetery already existing, which henceforth became associated with his name ; and so in like manner the fame of S. Agnes, the virgin-martyr (celebrated, as S. Jerome says, in the language and literature of every nation in the Church), caused her name to supersede the more ancient title of the cemetery in which she was buried ; just as another catacomb, on the old Via Salara, was once known by the name of S. Hermes ; then, a century later, by those of S. Protus and S. Hyacinth ; and finally, fifty years later, by that of Sta. Basilla.

But to return to our subterranean walk in the Catacombs of S. Agnes. After we have advanced some little way along the galleries, we turn aside to enter one of the subterranean chambers which we spoke of in a former chapter. It is a square apartment, made without bricks or mortar, merely hewn out of the rock like the galleries themselves, and, like them too, its walls are occupied by graves ; and at first sight it might almost seem as if this had been the only use for which it was designed. If, however, we turn round and look towards the door by which we entered, we see on either side a seat rudely carved out of the rock and projecting forwards into the chamber. It is obvious that these chairs could not have been added at a later date, but must have been made at the same time with the chamber itself, and

formed a part of the original design ; on the other sides of the chamber, too, are remains of a low ledge of the rock, manifestly intended to be used as a seat. Thus the whole appearance of this chamber, when carefully examined, at once suggests the idea that it was intended as a place of instruction to disciples. There is no altar here for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, for the only *arcosolium* in the chamber is much too high to have been so used ; moreover, the low seat which ran round the room would have been an obstacle ; but that low seat just answers to the idea of a bench for the catechumens, and there is the chair for the teacher,—the *Magister audientium*, as S. Cyprian calls him. That there are two chairs instead of one, is no doubt referable to the rule of ecclesiastical discipline of which we have already spoken, which required the separation of the sexes in places of public worship,—a rule, the observance of which was likely to be enforced with peculiar strictness in the chambers intended for instruction, as the persons frequenting them were yet unbaptized. In some of the chambers of this kind there is but a single chair,—and where men alone were to be instructed, no more was needed ; but where women were assembled, the Church, to avoid any occasion of scandal, required the presence of a deaconess, or some other appointed officer, to preside over them. It still remains to notice another characteristic of this chamber ; viz., that it is wholly devoid of painting ; for in those days they would not present the doctrines and mysteries of the Christian faith, even under signs and symbols, to the eyes of those who were not yet received as members of the Christian household.

Let us pass on, however, from this chamber, or school for catechism, as we may call it, to another

chamber at no great distance, and a single glance will be sufficient to detect the different purpose for which it was intended. First, one of the *arcosolia* is precisely of the fitting height for an altar, and all round the upper edge of the grave may be still traced the ledge in which the marble slab of the altar was secured ; next, in the opposite corner of the chamber, we see that necessary adjunct of a Catholic altar, the credence-table ; and, lastly, the whole roof is richly ornamented with painting. It is impossible to doubt that this chamber was used for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. As for the paintings, they are much less distinct than very many others in the Catacombs ; still they are worth studying, and, with the help of what we have said on the subject of these paintings generally, may be sufficiently recognized. The compartment in the centre of the roof contains the figure of a man seated, and on either side of him, on the ground, is a chest or case, filled apparently with rolls of parchment,—probably our Lord between the books of the Old and New Testament ; for in the Catacomb of S. Callixtus is a similar painting of our Lord with the four Evangelists : there He is Himself giving one of the Gospels to one of the Evangelists, and there are three rolls still remaining in the chest at His feet ; here the composition is more simple,—the Evangelists are not represented, and all the books remain in their chest. In the vault over the *arcosolium*, on the right, is the Good Shepherd, standing between two trees and sheep, and bearing a third sheep on his shoulders ; on one side is Daniel among the lions, and on the other the Three Children in the fiery furnace. In the *arcosolium* on the opposite side, the picture of Noe in his ark which once ornamented the vault can no longer be distinguished ; and it is only with difficulty that we can still recognize

the history of Jonas on the sides and at the back of the same grave. In the right-hand compartment of the roof or ceiling is Moses taking off his shoes, and in the opposite one Moses striking the rock and the waters flowing forth. In the compartment of the roof nearest the entrance is the paralytic carrying his bed ; but the painting of the corresponding compartment on the opposite side—the resurrection of Lazarus, copied by Bosio—is now entirely effaced. Besides these principal divisions of the roof, there are other paintings on the corners or ribs of the vaulting, each representing the figure of a person with arms extended in prayer,—two men and two women ; and on either side of each figure is a sheep. As we know nothing of the history of this particular chapel, no monument having been found to enable us to identify it as the burial-place of any particular martyr, we must be content to remain in ignorance as to who are intended by these figures ; we can scarcely err, however, in supposing them to be the persons, whoever they were, who were buried in this chamber.

Only a very few steps beyond this chapel is another, which presents the same manifest tokens of its use,—the altar and credence-table ; and the paintings are both better executed and in a better state of preservation. The Good Shepherd occupies, as usual, the central or most important place ; Adam and Eve, with the tree between them, Moses striking the rock, and Jonas lying under his tree, occupy three of the surrounding compartments ; while in the fourth, immediately over the altar, is seen the figure of a female with her arms outstretched in prayer. This figure is believed to be a representation of our Blessed Lady ; first, because the subjects would thus form a consecutive series, beginning with the book

of Genesis, continuing with the Law and the Prophets, and concluding with the Gospel; and, secondly, because the same figure (which is very frequently repeated in the Catacombs) is found also on a sepulchral monument of primitive Christianity at S. Maximin, in Provence, where it is accompanied by this legend,—“*Maria Virgo Minister de Tempulo Gerosale.*”<sup>\*</sup> The title here given to our Lady, taken from one of the pseudo-gospels current among the early Christians, instead of one of those expressing far higher dignity, such as Mother of God, which were given her by the Church in later times, attests the great antiquity of the monument; and there does not seem to be anything unreasonable in arguing from the Christian monuments of France to the contemporary Christian monuments of Rome. Besides, if we accept the only other interpretation that can be suggested of the picture in question, and suppose it to represent some individual buried in this chapel, we shall have to account, first, for its position among a series of wholly Scriptural subjects, and secondly, for its repetition; since the portrait of the deceased was clearly painted in its more usual place, namely, at the back of the *arcosolium*, where the fragments of painting still enable us to recognize it. On the arch of the vault over the same *arcosolium* is a representation of our Blessed Lord sitting with six of His disciples; and all the spaces between the principal subjects on the roof are filled with birds, fruits, vases of flowers, and other ornaments, such as are found in the ancient paintings of Pompeii, and other Pagan monuments.


In the immediate neighbourhood of this chapel an

<sup>\*</sup> For *Ministra de Templo Hierusalem*. See Macarii Hagioglypta, pp. 36, 238.



accidental giving-way of the soil under an *arcosolium* enables us to look down into a second *piano*, or story, so to call it, of this cemetery, full of graves just like the one in which we are walking; and opposite this tomb is another chapel, with paintings much defaced, but still worth looking at, as giving us subjects we have not seen before. Of a painting at the back of a very lofty *arcosolium*, only one compartment can now be distinguished, viz. the five wise virgins, who are represented with torches instead of lamps, according to the Roman practice; nevertheless, they carry also a little vessel, apparently for oil, as though the artist were unwilling altogether to depart from the Scriptural narrative. The paintings in the other two compartments, distinct enough in Bosio's time, and to be seen therefore in his work, have since almost perished. In the centre there was a female figure in prayer, with a dove by her side; and on the other side the same five virgins are again represented as having now entered into the marriage feast and seated at the table. Adam and Eve, and Daniel in the lions' den, occupy the two sides of the same vault; and on the outer wall, or front of the grave, are the Three Children in the fiery furnace, and a ship in full sail, from which two of the crew are throwing Jonas into the sea. Behind the ship Jonas is to be seen issuing from the fish's mouth, and above it he is lying under his gourd.

The visitor will do well to be content with these as sufficient specimens of painting, and, for the present at least, to resist the temptation of examining any more chapels. Let him ask to be conducted at once to that which is the special peculiarity of this Catacomb, and which makes it the proper starting-point (so to say) for any who wish to study the whole subject scientifically; I mean the *arenaria* or sand-

pit, to which we ascend by a staircase hewn out of the rock. As he threads his way, however, along the galleries which lead to it, he will observe that some of the graves have never been opened, and he may like to decipher the simple inscriptions which yet remain upon one or two of them, such as *Amantio filio dulcissimo, qui vixit annis duobus et d. xv. In pace*; and another, which belongs to some of the *fossore*s, or original excavators of the Catacomb, of whose family three several members died in the same month (of April), *Toti tres ipso mese*. Here and there, the marks of lamps, *ampullæ*, rings, and other ornaments that were once fastened into the cement which secured the grave-stones, may still be seen; an occasional palm-branch also, and even the Christian monogram  rudely scratched upon the same material.

On ascending the staircase, we find ourselves still indeed in a subterranean excavation, but in one of a very different character from the Catacombs which we have just left. The utter irregularity of its streets, and their great width, as well as the non-perpendicularity of their walls, at once denote that it is a sand-pit, and not a cemetery. It is on this spot that we can most advantageously consider the different theories that have been advanced as to the origin of the Catacombs, and which we have mentioned in a preceding chapter. Here, remembering the galleries and shelves so carefully excavated which we have just left below, we should call to mind the theory of Bishop Burnet, that the Catacombs were the mere *puticoli*, or open pits, where the vilest sort of Roman slaves were thrown and left to rot. Here, also, comparing those galleries below with those in which we are now standing, we should consider the opinion that has been held as to the identity of

the two ; and more especially we should study the remarks of Dr. Maitland upon this subject, testing their accuracy by our own personal observation. "The ramifications of the Catacombs," says that author, "may be classed in two divisions ; those originally dug for the purposes of procuring sand, known by their irregularity, as well as by their *smaller* dimensions, and the additions made by the Christians when want of space obliged them either to dig fresh galleries or to square and *enlarge* some of those already existing." Every word of this passage deserves to be studied and confronted with the actual facts of the case as seen in this *arenaria*. Here are subterranean excavations which, it is perfectly plain, were "originally dug for the purpose of procuring sand ;" neither do they appear to have been ever used for any other purpose. Certainly there is no token of any burials having taken place here ; nor, from the nature of the soil, was it possible that graves, such as those in the Catacombs, should ever have been made here. Moreover, these excavations may, as Dr. Maitland truly says, be distinguished from those below by their "irregularity ;" for the paths do not cross one another at right angles, and, in fact, are not worthy to be called paths at all, the sole object of the excavator having evidently been to extract as much soil as possible ; but when Dr. M. goes on to speak of their "smaller dimensions," we are disposed to suspect some typographical error (*smaller* for *larger*) until we find the same thing repeated by implication in the next line, where he says that the Christians had to square and *enlarge* the paths already existing when they wished to use them as cemeteries. To square them would certainly have been necessary, for no shelves capable of supporting bodies could have been made in the blocks of

sand as they now are ; but as to “enlarging” the galleries, they are already three times as wide as the paths in the Catacombs ; and when they had been squared, the disproportion would have been still further increased. A Catacomb, as we have before said, might, by destroying all its graves, be made to look like this arenaria ; but by no possible contrivance could this arenaria be made to look like a Catacomb. Again, he insinuates that the Christians only made the fresh galleries for themselves when they had used all those dug by the heathen ; “when want of space,” he says, “obliged them to dig fresh galleries.” How strange, then, that not a vestige of burial has been found in these vast heathen excavations. Surely it needs nothing more than a visit to this Catacomb and arenaria to convince us that they have no claim to be considered as “ramifications of the same plan,” but rather that they are as distinct from one another as any subterranean excavations can be.

At the same time we may see the great advantage which the Christians derived from making their Catacombs in immediate connection with an arenaria ; for, in one of the irregular streets of the latter, we come suddenly upon a square opening in the floor which descends to the gallery of the Catacomb that we have already traversed ; and if we imagine a windlass to have been fastened in this place, what more easy and simple than by means of this opening to remove all the soil displaced by the excavations beneath, and either to deposit it for a while, if necessary, in the recesses of this very arenaria, or, if there were no urgent necessity for such concealment, to cart it off at once as though it had been dug in the arenaria itself ? That this was the principal use and object of this shaft there can be no doubt ; but if we

look carefully, we shall see that there are also holes cut at regular intervals in its sides, by which it would have been possible to descend into the Catacomb ; and perhaps some of the primitive *fossores* may have been obliged, in times of very severe persecution, to block up the staircase by which we ascended, and which was the ordinary entrance, and to descend themselves, and carry the dead bodies which they had to bury, by this more difficult means of access.

As we return into the Catacomb, and retrace our steps along the same gallery by which we came to the staircase, we may observe how long it is before we meet with any cross-roads or any chapels ; once or twice, indeed, we may see the outline of a door distinctly marked out in the rock, and that space left free from graves ; but, for whatever reason, the excavation was never made. In all probability, the chapels and other chambers were purposely placed as far from the entrance as possible, in the hope of baffling pursuit ; as, even should the persecutors have made their way into the Catacomb, they might hesitate before they ventured to penetrate very far into the interior.

There are other chapels in this Catacomb which deserve a visit, but two in particular no one should leave without seeing ; one I will venture to call the Cathedral, and the other the Lady Chapel ; and both names will be seen to be strictly appropriate. A cathedral is only so called from its containing the *cathedra*, or chair, of the bishop ; and here we have the very *cathedra* in which probably many a Bishop of Rome has sat. It is not, indeed, of stone or marble, richly carved and ornamented, like those of later days ; but, like other chairs already spoken of in these Catacombs, hewn out of the living rock ; and its position sufficiently explains its use. It is at

the very end of a long, narrow chapel (or rather of two chapels divided by the path), precisely where the episcopal chair stands at the present day in many of the old Basilicas, at the end of the apse ; and there is the same low bench which we see in marble in the Basilicas for the accommodation of the presbytery, here cut, like the chair, out of the rock. Under the chancel arch, for such one may fairly call it, stood, no doubt, the portable altar ; so that the Bishop celebrated turning towards the people, as is still done in all the Basilicas ; and the two chambers, which together form this chapel (one on each side of the gallery, immediately opposite to each other) might contain about seventy or eighty people ; while over the gallery is a *luminare*, which served to give to both chambers something both of air and light.

A descent of half a dozen steps, at no great distance, takes us into what we have called the Lady Chapel, because over its altar may be seen a picture of our Blessed Lady with the Holy Child in her arms, or, to speak more accurately, with the Holy Child in front of her, supported by nothing ; for our Lady's arms are expanded in the usual form of the cross, as though she were continually praying and making intercession for her children. On the two sides of the same arcosolium is the figure of some martyr, who probably lay buried under the altar ; and, in the centre of the vault, another figure, now not to be certainly recognized, but not improbably that of our Blessed Lord. As to the antiquity of these paintings, they are not so early as those we have already seen in other parts of this Catacomb, for there is the monogram on either side of our Blessed Lady, of which we have no certain example before the time of Constantine ; but neither, in all probability, are they later than the end of the fourth or beginning of the

fifth century, because they have not the aureole of glory which came into general use about that period. They seem, therefore, to occupy a kind of intermediate place between the paintings of the first ages, or the days of persecution, and those of later date, when the Church, in peace and triumphant, adorned the tombs of her famous martyrs with paintings of which specimens shall be presently described from the Catacomb of S. Callixtus.

And now, though we are far from having seen all that is worth seeing in the Catacomb of S. Agnes, yet at least we have seen what is *best* worth seeing, and as much as most persons will care to see in the course of a single visit. There are one or two *arcosolia* in other galleries with the unusual representation of the three wise men standing before Herod, who sits upon the throne with the star over his head. For the most part, however, the paintings, both in the chapels and galleries to which we have not conducted our reader, only present inferior specimens of what we have already examined.

It will be better worth our while to pay a visit to the newly-discovered Catacomb of S. Alexander, which is situated on the same road, but five or six miles further from Rome.

Of the history of S. Alexander's life and death we have no really accurate and authentic information, the Acts which have come down to us being generally admitted to be spurious; still these spurious Acts must have been gathered from documents or traditions in great part genuine, for all that has been learnt concerning him from the Catacombs themselves has tended, not to invalidate, but to confirm them. It is certain that S. Alexander was the sixth successor from S. Peter in the see of Rome; that he was martyred at a very early period in the

second century, A.D. 117, or, at latest, 132 ; and that two of his companions in martyrdom were S. Eventius and S. Theodulus. The latter was a deacon, of whose history nothing is recorded ; the former a priest, of great age, as we are told, and venerable appearance, who had himself conversed with some of the Apostles, and had converted large numbers to the faith, amongst others the parents of S. Alexander himself. Of S. Alexander the Acts tell us that he was very young ; indeed, the judge addresses him as a man only about thirty, and makes use of his youth as an argument to persuade him to apostasy. All three were buried by a noble Roman lady on her estate, at the seventh milestone on the Via Nomentana : Eventius and Alexander together, and Theodulus in another grave apart. The Acts go on further to say, that a bishop was appointed specially for this place, that the Holy Sacrifice might always be offered there.

Now, among the monuments that recent discovery has brought to light, is a considerable portion of the altar, erected probably in the fourth or fifth century over S. Alexander's tomb, which had by that time been made the centre of a basilica, just like the tombs of S. Peter, S. Paul, S. Agnes, S. Lawrence, and others. Round this altar ran an inscription, which is incomplete, one word being wanted at the beginning, which, however, the Acts enable us to supply with confidence : that word was **EVENTIO** ; and then the inscription continues, —**ET ALEXANDRO DELICATUS VOTUM POSUIT DEDICANTE URSO EPI-SCOPO**. The Acts explain to us what would otherwise have been a perplexity, how the altar came to be consecrated by a bishop whose name does not appear among the list of bishops of Rome ; also, why the second place only is given in this inscription to Alexander, though the superior in dignity ; and



lastly, why two names, not three, appear in the inscription. In another part of this basilica may be seen a chapel, which, from the material and elaborate pattern of the pavement, it is clear was once very richly ornamented, and must therefore have been the burial-place of some great saint; and there, too, a fragment of an inscription gives us the word MARTYR. Are we wrong in conjecturing that here lay the martyr Theodulus?

A study of the inscriptions still remaining in the pavement of this old basilica will furnish us with monuments of the several grades of the hierarchy, from bishop to sub-deacon; and the dates, which are often specified, are all of the middle or latter end of the fifth century. They do not therefore properly belong to our subject, which concerns the cemeteries themselves rather than the churches which were built over them; we will enter the Catacomb itself. It is small and irregular, and bears evident tokens of unskilful workmanship, as compared with those nearer to the metropolis. Its irregularity even suggests the idea whether there may not have been here some subterranean excavation prior to the burial of Alexander; but perhaps the reason already given may sufficiently account for it. To the same cause we attribute the general absence of paintings, and of inscriptions engraved upon the marble slabs. Doves and flowers appear here and there in front of particular graves, with a short inscription also painted, such as *Ispiritus tus in bono*,—may thy spirit be in good, or God,—or a few inscriptions are scratched in the mortar, such as “*the burial-place of Sophia*,” on such a day, in Greek; and another, written in a strange confusion of Latin and Greek, both as to words and characters, which few people probably will have the skill or patience to decipher, but which

contains valuable testimony to the ancient faith in the Divinity of our Lord and other Catholic doctrines. I must not anticipate de Rossi's publication and interpretation of this important inscription ; but the first or upper line may at least be given, as being sufficiently legible to all :

ZHCHC IN ΔEO XPICTO YAH IN ΠAKE.

“Mayest thou live in God Christ, Sylva, in peace.”

But though this Catacomb is small, and its paintings and inscriptions few, it has, nevertheless, a peculiar interest of its own ; namely, that the larger number of the graves remain closed, just as they were left sixteen or seventeen hundred years ago ; and before some of them may still be seen the terracotta lamp, or the little vessel of bloodstained glass, undisturbed from the nest of mortar in which it was secured by the first Christians. Here, too, may be seen several Pagan tombstones or other monuments, used for Christian purposes ; and they are either turned upside down or set up sideways, or otherwise disposed of, in one of those ways already described, as showing clearly that they were used simply as material ; not for the sake of the inscriptions, which, on the contrary, it was attempted to render practically illegible.

Thus, a visit to this Catacomb would serve to confirm the conclusion sufficiently established by our examination of S. Agnes ; viz., that these sacred cemeteries were never contaminated by the burial of Pagans.



## CHAPTER VII.

### VISITS TO THE CATACOMBS ON THE VIA APPIA.



E have made our tour of the Catacomb of S. Agnes under the guidance of Father Marchi, whose excavations here, twelve or fifteen years ago, first fixed the public attention in an especial manner upon this cemetery.

Later discoveries have brought to light other more interesting Catacombs; that of S. Agnes, however, still remains the most convenient starting-point for those who would study these subterranean cemeteries to advantage, as there is nothing in it of religious or historical interest to distract our attention from a steady examination of the monuments themselves. Having made this tour, we will next wend our steps to the opposite side of the city, and leaving it by the Porta San Sebastiano, pursue our way along the Via Appia. This road in heathen times received the name of the Queen of roads from the excellence of its construction and beauty of its monuments. It is no less remarkable also in a Christian point of view, for the cemeteries which lie underneath the vineyards on either side are both the most extensive and the most important of all the Roman Catacombs.

Indeed, it was a cemetery on this road which was first known by the name of Catacomb, and to which alone it strictly belongs. In the old Roman calendars and itineraries many cemeteries are enumerated on the Via Appia, as the cemetery of S. Callixtus, of

S. Cornelius, of S. Sixtus, and others ; there is one also not distinguished by the name of any saint, but from some topographical peculiarity, the origin of which can be no longer ascertained, it is called the cemetery *ad Catacumbas*. And so long as the bodies of the saints remained undisturbed in their original burial-places and the Catacombs were still frequented for purposes of devotion, each cemetery retained its own proper name and there was no confusion ; the cemetery of S. Callixtus, for example, as described by ancient writers, being *very near* the Catacombs ; and the Catacombs themselves was that precise spot under the church of S. Sebastian, or rather under that semi-subterranean building to the left of the church and at the back of the high altar, in which, according to a very ancient and authentic tradition, the bodies of S. Peter and S. Paul once found a temporary resting-place.

We know that those apostles were originally buried each near the scene of his own martyrdom, the one at the Vatican, the other on the Ostian Way,\* on the spot where their respective Basilicas now stand ; but, as soon as the Oriental Christians had heard of their death, they sent some of their brethren to remove the bodies and bring them back to the East, where they considered that they had a right to claim them as their fellow-citizens and countrymen. These so far prospered in their mission as to gain a momentary possession of the sacred relics, which they carried off, along the Appian Way, as far as the spot where the church of S. Sebastian was afterwards built, about two miles from the city. This was probably their appointed place of rendezvous before starting on their homeward journey by way of Brundisium ;

\* Caius, a Christian writer of the second century, testifies to their being there in his day.—Euseb. H. E. ii. 25.

for just at this point, a cross-road, coming directly from S. Paul's, joins the Appian and Ostian Ways. Here they rested for a while, to make all things ready for their journey, or, according to another account, were detained by a thunderstorm of extraordinary violence, which delay, however occasioned, was sufficient to enable the Christians of Rome to overtake them and recover the lost treasure. These Roman Christians then buried the bodies, with the utmost secrecy, in a deep pit, which they dug on the very spot where they were. Soon, indeed, they were restored to their original places of sepulture, as we know from contemporary authorities, and there seems reason to believe the old ecclesiastical tradition to be correct which states them to have only remained in this temporary abode for a year and seven months. The body of S. Peter, however, was destined to revisit it a second time, and for a longer period ; for, at the beginning of the third century, a capricious fancy took possession of the mind of Heliogabalus, who was emperor at the time, to have a circus made on the Vatican, which would admit of four chariots abreast, each drawn by four elephants. To make this circus, all buildings that stood in the way were directed to be levelled, and, though the Christian cemetery of the Vatican was subterranean, yet there was of course danger that, in the extensive levelling of the soil thus contemplated, it might be detected and broken in upon. S. Callixtus, therefore, who was then Pope, in order to protect the relics of the great apostle from all risk of profanation, caused them to be removed to their former temporary hiding-place, the pit on the Appian Way ; and it may have been this circumstance, perhaps, which first induced him to labour so much in the adjoining cemetery that it has ever since retained his name. For the

same reasons, too, the Popes who succeeded him were no longer buried, as so many of them had heretofore been, in the Vatican cemetery, but in that of S. Callixtus, that they might continue to be laid as near as possible to the tomb of S. Peter. Perhaps, too, during this period, the Christian flock repaired to this cemetery for religious assemblies, or for refuge in times of danger, more willingly than to any other, as enjoying a sort of pre-eminence over the rest. But in A.D. 257 S. Stephen, the Pope, having been discovered within this very cemetery, and having suffered martyrdom there, it was no longer a safe resting-place for the most precious relic which the Roman church possessed ; for the heathen soldiery having once penetrated, there was no security against a second invasion ; and accordingly, in the following year the body of S. Peter was once more removed, and restored to its original tomb in the Vatican, where it has remained ever since.

A hundred years later, when the Church was in the enjoyment of peace and prosperity, she began to commemorate, by the erection of appropriate buildings, all those places which were peculiarly endeared to her by associations connected with her days of persecution. Now arose the basilicas of S. Peter, S. Paul, S. Agnes, S. Lorenzo, and many others ; and this spot on the Appian Way where the bodies of S. Peter and S. Paul had once remained for several months, and the body of S. Peter afterwards for a period of forty years, was not likely to be forgotten. It had always remained isolated and untouched, in spite of the extensive cemetery which, as we have seen, was excavated in its immediate neighbourhood ; and now, in the middle of the fourth century, a small oratory or chapel was built inclosing it, begun, as it would seem, during the pontificate of Pope

Liberius, and finished by Pope Damasus, who provided a marble pavement for its floor, and according to his usual practice, set up an inscription in verse, which is still extant, and in which he commemorates some of the events which we have been describing. One half of this building is below the level of the ground, and its architecture is so irregular and bad, that it appears impossible to assent to the opinion of those who assign to it a much higher antiquity, and still less of those who recognize in it an ancient heathen temple. Round the walls in the inside of this building is a low step, or seat, of stone, destined (Father Marchi conjectures) for the use of those who recited here in choir the psalms and public offices of the Church ; and in the middle of the area is a small square aperture, widening at the depth of two feet into a pit, measuring about six or seven feet both in length, breadth, and depth, which was that in which the bodies had lain. It is divided into two equal compartments by a long slab of marble, with marble also lining its sides to the height of three feet, while the vaulted roof of the building is covered with paintings of our Lord and His Apostles.

This is the spot to which was originally and exclusively given the name of Catacombs ; and being in such immediate proximity to one of the greater basilicas, it was never lost sight of. In like manner, the adjoining cemetery always remained known and accessible ; only by degrees the precise meaning of the name was lost, and its form a little corrupted ; so that instead of speaking of this part of subterranean Rome as the cemetery *ad Catacumbas*, men simply called it *Catacumbæ* ; and when, in the sixteenth century, other cemeteries were discovered like it on all sides of Rome, they made the name common

instead of proper, and called them all, indiscriminately, Catacombs. Later still, the name received a yet wider application, so that now it is often used for any subterranean excavation whatever that has been used as a place of burial.

But to return to the Via Appia, and our promised description of its ancient cemeteries. The limits we have assigned to ourselves forbid our entering the first of these cemeteries which we arrive at, on the left-hand side of the road, and in a corner of which are two or three *arcosolia* with paintings and inscriptions, belonging either to some sect of Gnostics, or, according to others, of Mithraic worshippers.\* We will go on a little further, and then enter a vineyard on the opposite side of the road, and descend into the cemetery of S. Callixtus.

Both ancient authority and modern research combine to show us that this was the most extensive and important of all the Christian Catacombs; and so rich is it in objects of interest, that the difficulty is what to select, more especially as new discoveries are been made here every day. We must content ourselves, however, with naming a few of the most important points, such as can be comprised in a single visit, and should on no account be omitted.

We will descend, then, by an old staircase lately restored, close to the now desecrated chapel in which S. Damasus, his mother and sister, were once buried. This staircase leads us immediately to the very central point of attraction and importance in the whole Catacomb. We come down upon the chamber in

\* The student should procure P. Garrucci's treatise, which contains very accurate copies both of the paintings and inscriptions. *Les Mystères du Synchrétisme Phrygien dans les Catacombes de Prétextat*. Poussielgue Rusand, Paris.



which were buried several Popes of the third century ; in which we may see the very tombstones of S. Antherus and S. Fabian, who sat in the chair of Peter from A.D. 235 to 250 ; of S. Lucius, who reigned in 252 ; and of S. Eutychianus, who died nearly thirty years later.\* We shall also see in this place a very long and interesting inscription, set up by Pope Damasus towards the latter end of the fourth century, specifying who lay buried in this chapel, and expressing his own desire to be buried near them, but his unwillingness to disturb the sacred ashes of the saints ; wherefore he built the little chapel already mentioned in the open air, immediately above this very spot. For the recovery of this inscription we are indebted to the skill and indefatigable labour of the Cavaliere de Rossi, who put together the hundred fragments into which it had been broken, and has now presented it to us in an almost perfect state, a few portions only being wanting, which he has supplied (in letters of a different colour) from the published collection of Pope Damasus's works, in which this epitaph has always existed.

Before we enter the chapel, however, in which all these things are to be seen, let us cast our eyes for a moment on the stuccoed wall at the entrance, which is covered with innumerable scribblings, the work of devout pilgrims who visited these places in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, and who often recorded here some aspirations to the saint whose shrine they came to visit, or some prayer for the soul for whose sake they had undertaken the pilgrimage ; just as the door of the theatre or walls of the barracks discovered at Pompeii bear the names which the soldiers

\* Of S. Cornelius, who came between the two last mentioned, we shall visit the grave in this same Catacomb presently.

idly scratched there, or as we may chance to see names and remarks scribbled on buildings at the present day. It would require the patience and practised eye of a De Rossi to decipher many of these scribblings (he has in fact deciphered them all), but some are sufficiently intelligible even to ordinary visitors: such as, SANCTE SUSTE (S. Sixtus was martyred in this cemetery, and buried in the neighbouring one of Pretextatus), BIBAS (for vivas) EN ΘΕΩ (mayest thou live in God), a curious mixture of Latin and Greek, and several others.

On entering the chapel itself, we see round us the various epitaphs which I have mentioned, and which were gathered but a few years since out of the heaps of soil with which this chapel was then filled, and are now fastened into the wall, merely for the sake of convenience, and not at all with any idea of assigning that particular inscription to that particular grave: the inscription of Pope Damasus, however, which we have mentioned, is certainly placed where it was first set up, and in front of it may be easily recognized the foundation of the altar with its four pillars.

In the corner of this chamber is an opening into another, the burial-place of many martyrs, and especially of the most celebrated virgin saint of Rome, S. Cecilia.

The legend of S. Cecilia is peculiarly interesting and beautiful, and the truth of its main facts all the research of modern times has tended greatly to corroborate. She was of noble blood and vast possessions, and still in extreme youth when her parents required her to marry a young nobleman named Valerian, who was of an excellent and amiable disposition, but a Pagan, the maiden being herself a Christian, though of what religion her parents were does not

appear. She submitted, however, to their will, though she had already, by secret vow, consecrated herself to the service of her Lord in the state of virginity; and on the day of her marriage, when Valerian had taken her to his own home, she told him of this vow, by which she was already wedded to a heavenly spouse, and declared to him that an angel of God was ever watching over her, who would certainly avenge her of any one who should attempt to violate it. To this Valerian replied by threatening to kill any earthly lover whom she might prefer to himself; but if she was really protected by an angel, he desired that he, too, might behold him, and in that case he promised to protect her vow. Cecilia answered, that he could not see the angel unless his eyes were illuminated with the gift of faith, through the Sacrament of Baptism, and desired him to go out of the city for two or three miles along the Appian Way, to a spot where he would see some beggars sitting by the wayside, and asking alms; to these he was to give money, to tell them Cecilia sent him, and bid them conduct him to the old man Urban. This he did; and was taken down into this very Catacomb of S. Callixtus to S. Urban the Pope, who instructed and baptized him that same night. On his return, he found, says the legend, Cecilia praying in her chamber and the angel by her side, and the angel crowned them both with red and white flowers,—the lilies of purity, and the roses of martyrdom. Presently Tiburtius, Valerian's brother, came in, and, struck with the heavenly fragrance of these flowers, and marvelling too whence they came—for it was not then the season of flowers,—inquired concerning them; whereupon his brother told him what had happened, and conducted him in his turn into this same Catacomb, where he also was baptized.

After this, Cecilia, her husband, and his brother, lived all three together in their palace in Rome, on the very spot where now stands the church of S. Cecilia ; and as many were induced by them to become Christians, and as their alms to the poor were boundless, they soon began to be the subject of much talk in the city. Almachius, therefore, the prefect, summoned the two young men before him, and commanded them to sacrifice to the gods. Upon their refusal, they were martyred. Cecilia still lived ; and Almachius feared that her youth, her nobility and wealth, and, above all, her boundless charity, which made her greatly beloved among the poor, would excite a tumult, if he proceeded to extremities against her in public ; he therefore did as was not unfrequent in Rome when persons of very high rank were to be put to death ; he sent executioners to her own palace, with orders to stifle her in the bath, which was extraordinarily heated for the purpose, but in vain. He then commanded that her head should be cut off ; but the executioner, though he struck three times, did not sever the neck, and it was unlawful to strike a fourth time. She prayed that she might yet live three days more to complete the transfer of her palace to the Church, and God granted her prayers ; and during this interval she continued, says the legend, to persuade many to become Christians, and on the third day quietly composed herself to her last sleep, after which Pope Urban buried her with his own hands in this cemetery of S. Callixtus, in a chamber “ near his own colleagues.”

The history of the discovery of her tomb, or rather the connection of the several minute links which form the chain of evidence by which it is identified, is so curious and interesting as to deserve special

mention. It had never been forgotten that S. Cecilia had been buried in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, but it had been supposed that the cemetery of S. Callixtus was that to which we gain access from the church of S. Sebastian, about a quarter of a mile further on in this same road; and a French archbishop, therefore, in the beginning of the fifteenth century, set up an inscription in that cemetery to commemorate the virgin saint. The place of that inscription had come, in later times, to be pointed out as the precise spot where she was buried. De Rossi, however, having discovered the chapel which we have mentioned, in which the Popes were buried, was sure that the real tomb of S. Cecilia could not be far off; for, as we have seen, the acts of her martyrdom had told us that S. Urban had buried her with his own hands, near his colleagues. Moreover, certain descriptions of the sacred places of Rome, written in the first half of the seventh century, whilst yet the bodies of the saints buried in the Catacombs lay in their original graves, not having been translated into the churches within the city, distinctly mention that S. Cecilia was buried in the chamber next to that in which were S. Fabian, S. Antherus, and the other Popes. Lastly, we are told of Pope Paschal, who, in the beginning of the ninth century, removed the bodies of those saints, that, searching afterwards for that of S. Cecilia, he was told in a vision that, when he translated the relics of the Popes in question, she was so close to him that she could have spoken to him, *os ad os*, mouth to mouth. In consequence of which vision\* he returned to the

\* This vision forms the subject of the interesting fragment of an old fresco that may still be seen at the end of the church of S. Cecilia. Pope Paschal found her body quite incorrupt; and so it was also in the sixteenth cen-

search, found the body where he had been told, and removed it to the church of Santa Cecilia, in Trastevere. Thus everything combined to assure De Rossi that he was now in the immediate neighbourhood of her tomb. The chamber, however, was full of earth, even to the very top of the *luminare* which opened into it; and all this soil had to be removed. As the work of excavation proceeded, there came to light, first, on the wall of the *luminare* itself, representations of three saints, each with his own name inscribed,—Policamus, Sabastianus, and Cyrinus,—who are all three named in the itineraries of the seventh century as having been buried in the same chapel with S. Cecilia; then, lower down, on another side of the chamber, and on the wall, appeared a painting of a young lady very richly attired, and ornamented with bracelets and necklaces, such as might be looked for in a high-born and wealthy Roman bride, and which we can hardly suppose to be other than S. Cecilia. Still further down, on the same wall, was the figure of S. Urban, in full pontifical dress, with his name inscribed; and also a large head of our Lord, represented according to the Byzantine type, and with rays of glory behind it in the form of a Greek cross. The whole character of the painting belongs to a late date, that is, to the sixth or seventh centuries, if not later; but it must have been executed

tury, when the shrine was re-opened and the body exposed to public veneration for three or four weeks. The beautiful statue of the saint under the high altar was executed at that time by an artist who, as the inscription itself testifies, himself saw the body, and, as he tells us, sought to express the saint in marble such as he had with his own eyes seen her. See the whole history of the discovery, which is most interesting, either in the Abbé Gueranger's valuable life of the saint, or in the *Acts of the Early Martyrs*, part ii. (Burns and Lambert).

before the tradition as to the exact position of the bodies was lost or obscured, or the bodies themselves removed. All these indications, taken together, put it beyond a doubt that we have now recovered the lost thread of tradition, and are again enabled to identify the sepulchre of the most famous of Rome's virgin saints.

Passing out of these chambers, which are thus proved to belong to the earlier part of the third century, we come to another series, probably of still earlier date, in which are repeated, over and over again, those symbolical representations of the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist of which we spoke in our chapter on the paintings of the Catacombs. The paintings on the roofs of these chambers are for the most part obliterated ; only here and there a Good Shepherd may be recognized in the centre, and peacocks, and doves, and roses, and the other usual and symbolical ornaments, symmetrically arranged in the various compartments of the pattern. It is to the paintings on the walls, and between the graves, that we have specially to direct our attention. Moses striking the rock ; a man fishing, and drawing his fish out of the water ; a man baptizing ; seven men seated at a table and partaking of bread and fish ; a three-legged table, having on it a fish and loaf ; these are the principal figures which we meet with in the first chamber. In the second, we have the same repeated, with the addition of a priest consecrating, or at least holding his hands over the fish and the loaf on the *tripos*, or sacred table ; the paralytic also carrying his bed ; Abraham and Isaac, with the ram that was to be sacrificed in his stead ; and two figures of the *fossores*, bearing in their hands the long-handled pickaxe, with which alone the deep narrow shelves or graves of the Catacombs could have been ex-

cavated. A higher range of pictures in this chamber, immediately below the roof, presents us with the usual scenes from the history of Jonas, some of which appear also in the three next chambers ; and it is very remarkable that in the last chamber a cross is painted at the end of the ship as its sign or standard. The mast and yard are represented in this painting in such a manner as necessarily to suggest the same idea of the cross to all Christian eyes ; but besides this, the sacred emblem itself is distinctly represented, without any disguise at all, in the manner I have mentioned.

In other of these chambers it is clear that some martyrs of distinction were at one time buried ; for we find the same traces of later additional adornment that we find in the chamber of the Popes already described ; that is to say, we see vestiges of the old simple painting which was originally placed upon the walls, or in the vault of the arcosolium ; and then at a subsequent period the whole chamber, and even the inside of the principal tombs themselves, was lined with marble, large portions of which still remain undisturbed. I have not heard that any one is able to state with certainty who these martyrs may have been ; but the indefatigable researches of Christian archæologists have of late years made such immense progress in defining the internal geography (if I may call it such) of these Catacombs, that we may confidently look for other interesting revelations, as the work of excavation proceeds.

De Rossi caused the very gallery of which we have been speaking to be cleared of all the earth and other materials with which during the last ten centuries it had been encumbered, precisely because his study of ancient documents had taught him that the tomb of another of the early Pontiffs, S. Eusebius, A.D. 310,



was to be expected somewhere in this direction. As he proceeded, the appearance of an old wall, and then of an arch of solid masonry, right across the gallery, confirmed him in his expectations; but he had scarcely advanced another foot, when he suddenly found all progress arrested by the living rock. Disappointed for the moment, he was not at all disheartened; he immediately recognized that these walls and arches of solid masonry were the substructions necessary to support some staircase by which direct access was to be gained to the object of his search. He had come to the back of the staircase instead of the front; he must now retrace his steps, penetrate a little further into the interior of the cemetery, and then take the first gallery which he could find parallel with the one which had disappointed him. We will follow in his footsteps, and we shall soon find ourselves at another most interesting monument of this Catacomb. We return along the gallery whose chambers have just been described, mount the few steps at the end, and then turn to the left through another chamber whose form has evidently been changed, and some of its graves destroyed, for the sake of making use of it as a passage. If we pursue our way straightforward, we shall find ourselves in a gallery with chambers on either side, containing, amongst other objects of interest, a tombstone in the floor to one "Paul, an exorcist, buried near the martyrs" (*Paulus Exorcista Dep. Martyries: sc. ad Martyres*), and a sarcophagus having the heads of SS. Peter and Paul at either end instead of the usual representations of the sun. But the ordinary visitor will do better to withstand the temptation of visiting these, and to take the first gallery on the left, which runs parallel, as we have said, with the gallery of the sacramental pictures. Here, too, he will find many chambers on either side,

offering him much that is new and valuable, before he reaches the chapel of S. Eusebius. In a chamber on the right, with a paved floor, he will see the dates of the three burials which filled the principal tomb or arcosolium, and which succeeded one another within a very few months:—

Dep: Profuturi. iiii. Kal. Mar.

Dep: Quiriaci. vi. Idus Jun.

Dep: Primi. v. Non. Juli.

In another, on the left, are three sarcophagi, found at the depth of three or four feet under the floor, whilst digging the foundations for the new wall which was necessary to support the soil. One of these has no figures carved upon it at all; it has merely the common ornament of wavy lines in front, leaving a blank tablet in the midst for the name of the deceased. Another has at either end a representation of the Good Shepherd, which would seem to have been executed by Pagan rather than Christian hands; as the shepherd's dog is added, which has no place in the Christian parable, nor in early Christian interpreters of Holy Scripture; of both these the original cover has been removed, and a plate of glass substituted, through which we can see the perfect skeletons wrapped in the sheet or other stuff with which they were first buried. The third sarcophagus is smaller than the others, and covered with Christian sculpture; Noe taking the dove into the ark, Daniel between the lions, our Lord changing the water into wine, and the resurrection of Lazarus.

As we advance a little further in the gallery, we shall find ourselves passing through a broken wall, with another broken wall on our right, which once precluded all possibility of penetrating into that

portion of the Catacomb, and on our left a staircase, not fully exhumed, but which clearly was made in the peaceful times of the Church, like that by which we descended to the chamber of the Pontiffs. Standing in this broken wall, we cannot fail to recognize the intention of its builders; viz., to prevent the pilgrims who came to visit the tomb of S. Eusebius from wandering into any other part of the Catacomb. As soon as they found themselves at the bottom of the staircase, the only path that was open to them was that to the left, which led immediately to the object of their search. Accordingly, after a few steps, we find ourselves under a *luminare*, which gives air and ventilation in the usual manner to chambers on either side of the gallery. Here, there is one chamber on the left, and two on the right, and all have evidently been highly ornamented and very constantly visited during the earliest ages. The vaults of three or four of the *arcosolia* were once covered with mosaics, the patterns of which may still be distinguished by a little attention. Moreover, the walls of the first chamber on the right are covered with many of those *graffiti* or scribblings, of which we have already spoken; the names of a priest, of one or two bishops, and of several others of the faithful who visited the place as pilgrims, and occasionally a short prayer either for the living or the dead; as, for instance, "Moros, mayest thou live in Christ;" "Lord, help thy servant, Benjamin;" &c. It is in the chamber on the left, however, that the most important monument is now to be seen. It is an inscription by Pope Damasus in honour of S. Eusebius, found here in fragments and put together by De Rossi; and the slab of marble on which it is engraved, had previously been used for some public monument in honour of the Emperor Caracalla.

The legend distinctly says that the inscription is the work of Damasus—*Damasus Episcopus fecit Eusebio Episcopo et Martyri*; and the letters arranged singly, one above another in two columns at either side, tell us, moreover, the name of the engraver, and that he was a very attached and devoted admirer of the Pope, *Damasi Papæ cultor atque amator Furius Dionysius Filocalus scripsit*. Before the discovery of this monument, the Cavaliere di Rossi had already announced to the Archæological Society of Rome his own intimate conviction that all the Damasine inscriptions were the work of the same hand, who was no ordinary stonemason, but an artist who devoted his talent of caligraphy to the execution of these sacred monuments; and he even hazarded a conjecture, founded upon a number of minute details of fact, through which we are unable to follow him, as to the name of this artist. The discovery of this inscription seemed at first to put the truth of his conjecture beyond all question; yet, on looking at it again, every one will observe that this specimen is not worthy to be compared with those which are usually called Damasine inscriptions. There is a manifest imitation of some of the Damasine characteristics, such, for instance, as the graceful *virgulæ* at the extremities of many of the letters; but the imitation is very badly executed—the letters are not deeply cut, the lines are not of equal length, and its whole appearance is altogether inferior. De Rossi then conjectured that this was not the original stone, but only a very ancient copy; one of those, probably, restored by Pope Vigilius after the work of sacrilegious destruction had been begun in the Catacombs by invading barbarians. This conjecture, though not very favourably received at first, has now been proved to be correct; for on a close examination of all the

earth removed from this chamber and gallery, five or six fragments of the original inscription have been found, which the veriest tyro in these studies cannot fail to recognize as genuine Damasine letters. One of these may be seen in the chamber itself; the rest are fastened into the wall in their proper places in the copy of this inscription lately set up in the Christian gallery of the museum at the Lateran Palace.

We have said a good deal about the outward form and accidental history (so to speak) of this inscription; but we must now speak of its substance and sense. It tells us something of the history of S. Eusebius which we did not know before; viz., that during the short period of his pontificate, a heretic named Heraclius created such a division among the people as led even to public disturbances and riot, in consequence of which the heathen emperor—according to the usual practice of those who are unable or unwilling to appreciate the real merits of a dispute—punished both parties alike, both the heretic and the Pope, or ruler (*rector*), as Damasus, both in this and in other inscriptions, calls the Bishop of Rome. Eusebius, conscious of his innocence, and appealing to God as his judge, joyfully went forth into exile on the shores of Sicily, where he shortly afterwards died. All this is told us in the epitaph;\* the only point which is involved in obscurity concerns the exact nature

\* For the benefit of the learned reader we subjoin a copy of the inscription:—

Heraclius vetuit lapsos peccata dolere.  
Eusebius docuit miseros sua crimina flere.  
Scinditur in partes populus, gliscente furore;  
Seditio, bellum, cœdes, discordia, lites.  
Extemplo pariter pulsus feritate tyranni,  
Integra cum rector servaret fœdera pacis.  
Pertulit exilium Domino sub iudice lætus  
Littore Trinacrio mundum vitamque reliquit.

of the heresy promoted by Heraclius ; and this in consequence of the necessary brevity of expression in metrical inscriptions of this kind. It is only said that Heraclius forbade the lapsed, *i.e.* those who in times of persecution had fallen away from the faith, to weep over their sins ; but he may have done this either because he was a Montanist, and so considered the case of these sinners to be so desperate, that there was no forgiveness for them ; or, on the other hand, he may have been too lax, and wished to see them restored to the communion of the faithful without doing any penance at all. It would be quite out of place in a volume like the present to enter into a discussion of the various arguments that might be urged in favour of either of these views ; and we have perhaps already detained our readers too long in this chamber. Let us pass on still further into the interior of the Catacombs till we come to a chapel in which there is a double *arcosolium*, one behind the other, capable together of holding five bodies, and on the wall above the *arcosolium* very early paintings of the five saints who were buried there ; paintings cut through and spoiled in later times by the excavation of fresh graves, but still remaining in sufficient preservation to show the age to which they belong. Each of these saints is praying with hands extended, and over the head of each is his or her name, with the usual Christian formula ; that is, *Dionysas in pace, Procopi in pace, Zoa in pace, &c.* Between these figures are interspersed birds and flowers, as emblematical of the joy and peace of Paradise ; and below, on either side, is a peacock, the emblem of immortality.

Not far from this we come to another chapel, whose paintings, if we may judge from their style, are of yet earlier date, and certainly, from their sub-

ject, are far more interesting. The central piece has been cut through, like the last paintings described, by a later grave, but enough remains to leave no doubt as to the subject, and De Rossi's explanation of it is so complete in itself, and fits in so well, both with the details of the painting itself and with ecclesiastical history, that there seems no reason to dispute its correctness. First, the Good Shepherd stands in the middle between two sheep, bearing a third on his shoulder. Then, on either side of the Good Shepherd, an apostle is hurrying forth to gather more sheep into the fold; and here one sheep is turning towards the apostle, another turning his back upon him; a third standing with outstretched neck, in the most intense attitude of attention, while a fourth seems to observe a kind of middle course, not altogether refusing to listen, but, with his head bent down, busily engaged in feeding at the same time. Surely these very aptly image the different dispositions with which different men receive the Gospel message,—some lend a willing ear, and take it in with their whole hearts; others utterly refuse to attend; while others, again, endeavour to make a compromise between God and Mammon. A passage which De Rossi quotes from an early Christian writer curiously illustrates this interpretation of the painting in question, inasmuch as it compares the poor to sheep in a barren desert, where, having no grass to feed on, they have nothing to hinder their looking up and seeking after those things that are above; whereas the rich are like sheep in a fruitful and pleasant pasture, with their heads and hearts always intent upon the things of this lower earth. Then, again, a shower of rain\* is falling in abundance over the listening

\* Or water from the rock,—it is not easy to distinguish which; but, in either case, the sense is the same.

sheep, and more scantily on the one which is bending down to feed, while the one who turns his back is left altogether dry. Surely no one can doubt that allusion is here made to the dews and freshening showers of divine grace, which are sent to fertilize our souls and to make them capable of bringing forth the fruit of good works, just as rain fertilizes the earth. We cannot consider this interpretation of the picture to be fanciful or unwarranted, since each separate detail of it is supported by scriptural or patristic authority, and the artist has only combined them into a picturesque whole.

On the side of the same *arcosolium* is Moses taking off his shoe, with the hand of God calling him up into the mountain, and again Moses striking the rock; but the two figures of Moses are essentially different, and that, no doubt, for the reason alleged in a former chapter, that this painting is to be understood not historically, but symbolically; Moses striking the rock typifying St. Peter, to whom were intrusted the sacraments of the Christian Church. And on the other side, broken through, however, and almost destroyed by a niche made to receive a large lamp, is a painting of our Lord, standing between two of his disciples, and multiplying the loaves and fishes. Thus we have the Sacrament of Baptism on the one side, and of the Holy Eucharist on the other, while that of Penance, or more properly the whole Gospel scheme, occupies the centre.

It would take us too long to penetrate far enough into the interior of this vast cemetery, to visit the chapel of the Four Evangelists and others; we must content ourselves with another of its historical monuments, which lies at the foot of a staircase by which we may regain the upper air. I mean the



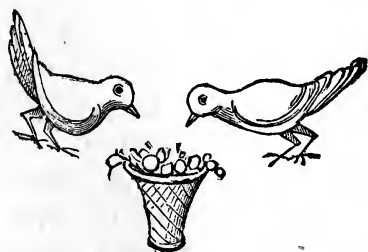
tomb of S. Cornelius, which lies apart from the chapel of all the other Popes, because he did not die at Rome, but at Civita Vecchia, whence his body was brought to Rome and interred in this cemetery by the private devotion of a noble Roman lady. This tomb, therefore, is not a simple shelf, like the others, but quite a large deep vault, with an arched roof. One portion of the stone which closed it was found, a few years since, among other monuments, in the vineyard above ; and having upon it portions of the letters N E, followed by LIUS MARTYR, De Rossi at once conjectured that it was the tombstone of S. Cornelius. When the Pope had purchased the vineyard, and excavations were begun there under the superintendence of the Commission of Sacred Archæology, the other half of the inscription came to light, and proved his conjecture to be true. The letters CORN

EP. showed, not only that the martyr here buried was called Cornelius, but that he was no other than the Pope of that name ; and even if the title Episcopus had been wanting, there would still have been no doubt of his identity ; for, on the wall, by the side of the grave, is a painting of the Pope, with his name written at length ; and both above and below the grave, fragments of a Damatine inscription still remain attached to the wall. Before this had been discovered, De Rossi had already expressed his confident expectation of finding at the tomb of S. Cornelius some memorial of his contemporary and correspondent, S. Cyprian. These two saints were martyred on the same day, though in different years ; and their feasts were therefore always celebrated together, just as they are now, on the 16th of September ; and the celebration was held at this very tomb of S. Cornelius, as the most ancient calendars

and missals assure us. Now, we read in one of the old itineraries, after a description of this spot, that here were buried S. Cornelius and S. Cyprian, which, as we know, is a mistake, S. Cyprian having been buried in Africa, where he was martyred. De Rossi, however, felt sure that something which had been seen or heard at the tomb of S. Cornelius by the pilgrim who wrote the itinerary must have given occasion to the idea. This conjecture was again confirmed in the most remarkable manner; for, by the side of S. Cornelius is another pontifical figure, and the few letters of the name which can be distinguished are sufficient to show that this was no other than S. Cyprian himself.

Before these pictures is a low block or pillar, on which may be seen a portion of the marble slab which once covered the whole of it, and on this slab was a large vase of oil, with floating wicks burning, from which the pilgrims used to help themselves at pleasure, carrying oil away as a relic from the shrine of S. Cornelius,—just as the poor still do from before the statue of the Madonna at S. Agostino or other celebrated shrines. When the Empress Constantina wrote to S. Gregory the Great, at the close of the sixth century, asking that the head of S. Paul might be sent to enrich a chapel that had just been built in the imperial palace, he refused to comply with her request, on the ground that in Rome they had no custom of breaking or dividing the bodies of the saints; but he went on to specify what relics Rome was in the habit of using and giving away. These, he says, are of two kinds; first, oil from the lamps which are kept burning before the real relics; and secondly, *brandea*, that is, handkerchiefs, or stoles, or some other similar articles, which had been let down to rest on the tomb of the martyr, and, after remain-

ing there a certain time, were sent away as relics,—just as the *pallium*, sent by the Pope to the various archbishops of Christendom, lies on the tomb of S. Peter until it is wanted. In the cathedral of Monza is preserved to this day a parchment roll containing a list of relics sent by S. Gregory to the Lombard Queen Theodelinda, and amongst them is *Ex oleo S. Cornelii*, which must have come from this very spot. These facts are worth noticing, as they tend to explain many of those cases in which different churches claim to have the same body in their treasury of relics. One church, it may be, has the true relic entire, while the other, many centuries ago, received oil or *brandea* sent from that relic; and in later times, after the practice of giving such had died out, a tradition, or perhaps a written document may remain, testifying to their possession of such and such a relic, which they have grown gradually to identify with the body of the saint itself. On the other side of the tomb of Cornelius is a figure of S. Sixtus, pope, who was martyred in this cemetery, and of another pope by his side; but for the legend which ran round these figures, as well as for the inscriptions of Pope Damasus above and below the grave itself, and sundry scribblings on the wall, we must be content to wait till De Rossi's great collection of all the Christian inscriptions of Rome during the first six centuries be complete and published.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### VISIT TO THE CATACOMB OF SS. NEREUS AND ACHILLES, AND OTHER CATACOMBS.



HE Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, or of S. Domitilla, as it is sometimes called, at the Tor Marancia, on the Via Ardeatina, is interesting, both on account of the architecture of some of its chapels, its paintings, and its inscriptions. Here also S. Gregory the Great delivered one of his homilies,—the same which Baronius erroneously supposed him to have delivered in the church dedicated to those saints within the city. The Holy Pontiff expressly mentions his being then present before the bodies of the saints of whom he spoke; but they had not at his time been translated from their original resting-places in the Catacombs. Their sepulchre was in all probability in that chapel to which we descend by so magnificent a staircase, and which is illumined by so fine a *luminare*, both of which are clearly additions made in the age of Constantine, like those which we have already seen in the cemetery of S. Callixtus: for that this is the central point of attraction in this Catacomb is clear, both from the staircase and *luminare* just mentioned, as also from the greater width of the adjacent galleries, and other similar tokens. There is a higher and more ancient *piano*, in which coins and medals of the first two centuries and inscriptions of great value have been recently

discovered ; and of these a full account will be presently published by the Cavaliere di Rossi. Some of the inscriptions may still be seen in various chambers near the bottom of the staircase. They are both Latin and Greek ; sometimes both languages are mixed ; and in one or two instances Latin words are written in Greek characters : as, for instance :—

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΚ\* ΕΤ ΛΕΟΝΤΙΑ  
 ΚΕΙΡΙΚΕ ΦΕΙΛΙΕ ΒΕΝΕΜΕΡΕΝ  
 ΤΙ ΜΝΗΘΗΚ ΙΗΘΥΚ  
 Ο ΚΥΡΙΟΚ ΤΕΚΝΟΝ Ε . . .

“Demetrius and Leontia to their well-deserving daughter Syrica. Remember, O Lord Jesus, our child.”

VICTORIA REFRIGER.  
 ISSPIRITUS TUS IN BONO.

“Victoria, may thy spirit be refreshed in good”—  
*i.e.* in God.

LEA ANIMA DULCIS ZESES.

“Lea, sweet soul, mayest thou live”—[for ever, or in peace, or in God, &c., according to the usual termination of this prayer.]

. . . VIBAS IN PACE ET PETE PRO NOBIS.

“Mayst thou live in peace and pray for us.”

Or the same in Greek, at the end of an inscription to the memory of one Augendus, who was buried on the thirteenth day before the calends of June.

ΖΗΚΑΙΚ ΕΝ ΚΩ ΚΑΙ ΕΡΩΤΑ ΥΠΕΡ ΗΜΩΝ.

“Mayst thou live in the Lord, and pray for us.”

\* This is the Hellenist or Alexandrine corruption for ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΚ: as in the cemetery of S. Callixtus the name of S. Lucius is written ΔΟΥΚΙΚ.

This is not the place in which to insist upon the value of these monuments in a religious point of view. There is another inscription, however, of considerable archæological interest, which is worth transcribing. It runs thus :—

M. ANTONIUS RESTUTUS FECIT YPOGEU  
SIBI ET SUIS FIDENTIBUS IN DOMINO.

“M. Antonius Restutus made this subterranean for himself and those of his family who believe in the Lord.”

The triple name, and the limitation at the end of this inscription (which shows that many of his family were still Pagan), are unquestionable proofs of its high antiquity, and it teaches us that even in the very first ages private Christians used sometimes to make these subterranean chambers at their own expense and for their own use.

The galleries in this Catacomb will be found to be in a more ruinous condition than those of S. Agnes and S. Callixtus, so that we are obliged to pass up and down from one piano to another, in order to make progress. Large niches, cased with marble, may often be seen at the corners of the streets, for the reception of lamps or some similar purpose ; the *arcosolia*, and even the ordinary graves in the streets, are more frequently ornamented with painting here than elsewhere, and the paintings are generally executed on a larger scale, and with some little addition or variation in the mode of treating the subject. Thus, the vaults of two *arcosolia*, immediately opposite one another in one of the galleries, give us very fine specimens of the Good Shepherd between two sheep ; but behind each sheep stands the figure of a man or woman in the attitude of prayer, as though with the intention of explaining the parable. The same thing

is to be noticed also in another part of this cemetery, where a certain Januarius buried his wife, and put up an inscription *Januarius cojugi fecit*, with a portrait of his (anonymous) wife, repeated, together with a sheep, on either side of the grave. The other paintings at the sides of these *arcosolia* are the raising of Lazarus and the striking of the rock for water. In the centre of another *arcosolium*, our Lord is seated in the midst of His Apostles; but on the front and sides, instead of any of the usual Scriptural subjects, we have what at first might almost be mistaken for a Bacchanalian scene, *i.e.* little winged *genii* gathering grapes into baskets. The subject, however, was not an uncommon one in the hands of Christian artists in those days, who seem to have used it as a figure of the harvest, or end of the world.

The first chapel that we come to in the interior of this Catacomb is of a very unusual shape; and one of its apses contains the same scene, of our Lord in the midst of His Apostles, but with the peculiarity that two of the Apostles are seated, viz. S. Peter and S. Paul,\* whilst all the rest stand; and in the opposite apse—for the whole chapel consists of little else than two apses, with a narrow gallery between them—there is a very fine figure of a Good Shepherd, having sheep on either side of him, and several other figures which it is not easy to distinguish, but in which Bosio was able to read the representations of the four

\* These paintings are so injured by time, that the identity of these figures can scarcely now be recognized; they were copied, however, by Bosio, and represent the received types of those Apostles too exactly to leave any room for doubt. The identity is the more unquestionable, because Bosio himself, misinterpreting the painting to be of our Lord sitting in the Temple in the midst of the doctors, did not observe or understand it.

seasons : the gathering of roses, for spring ; the reaping of corn, for summer ; a cornucopia full of fruit, for autumn ; a leafless tree, and a man digging, with a fire by his side, for winter. The vaults of the four *arcosolia* in this chapel represent the four scenes of the history of Jonas ; but the paintings on the other parts of the wall, which even Bosio could not interpret, can now scarcely be discerned. It is evident that this curious chapel must have been once a great object of attraction ; for when there was no more room for burial either in its walls or pavement, four monuments were built in front of the original *arcosolia*, filling up even the very area of the chapel. Only two of these still remain, and all their contents have of course long since been removed ; but we cannot subscribe to the opinion of Bosio that these tombs had ever been used as altars. It is possible that the *arcosolia* may have been altars, and then these tombs were made out of devotion, in order to be buried near to the martyrs ; or the whole chamber was nothing but a family vault, and they were made as the only means that were left for providing more space for burial. Another chapel in the same neighbourhood is hexagonal, and the ceiling is divided into several compartments by wreaths of roses, surmounted by a peacock standing on a globe ; each compartment contains one of the usual subjects, Noe and his ark, the three children in the fiery furnace, Abraham going to offer his son Isaac, and our Lord multiplying the loaves and fishes. In the middle of the *arcosolium*, on the right, as we enter this chapel, Adam and Eve stand with the fatal tree between them ; whilst the sides are occupied by the figure of a person in prayer, and the paralytic carrying his bed. In the corresponding tomb on the left, we find Daniel between the lions, and two single figures



seated, each with a chest of volumes at his feet, probably intended for S. Peter and S. Paul. Adam and Eve appear again on a tomb in one of the galleries on the higher piano ; as also our Blessed Lady, seated and bearing the Holy Infant in her arms, with two Magi on either side, bringing their gifts ; and, lastly, we come to a chapel, having semi-detached pillars cut out of the rock in each corner, and one of its tombs ornamented with a painting of Orpheus with his lyre, surrounded by the birds and beasts whom his music has charmed, and another with the ascent of Elias into heaven. Both these subjects have been sufficiently explained before ; but it is worth observing that in the last painting, besides the figures of Elias and Eliseus (to whom the former is giving his cloak), there appears a third figure, standing before the horses' heads, whose dress and attitude would seem to have been copied from some Pagan representation of Mercury.

If we pursue our way along the cross-road from which we descend to the Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, we shall come to the magnificent Basilica of St. Paul's, which like St. Peter's, S. Lorenzo, and most of the other basilicas, was originally built over a cemetery or Catacomb. Small portions of the Catacomb may still be entered from some of the neighbouring vineyards, but there is nothing very worthy of notice. If we cross the river, we come to the Catacomb of San Ponziano, situated on the side of the hill between the Porta Portese and the Porta San Pancrazio ; which contains the only specimen still extant of a primitive subterranean baptistery. A small stream of water runs through the cemetery, and at this one place the channel has been deepened so as to form a kind of reservoir, in which a certain quantity of water is retained. We descend into it by a flight of

steps, and the depth of water always varies with the height of the Tiber. When that river is swollen so as to block up the exit by which the stream usually empties itself, the waters are sometimes so dammed back as to inundate the adjacent galleries of the Catacombs; at other times there are not above three or four feet of water. At the back of the font, so to call it, and springing out of the water, is painted a beautiful Latin Cross, from whose sides leaves and flowers are budding forth, and on the two arms rest two candlesticks, with the letters Alpha and Omega suspended by a little chain below them. This may probably have been intended to denote that Christ had given efficacy to the waters of baptism only by the cross planted therein—*Baptisma cruce consecrans*, as one of the Church hymns expresses it. On the front of the arch over the font is the Baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan by S. John, whilst S. Abdon, S. Sennen, S. Miles, and other saints of the Oriental Church occupy the sides. These paintings are all of late date, perhaps of the seventh or eighth century; but there is no reason to doubt but that the baptistery had been so used from the earliest times. We have distinct evidence in the Acts of the Martyrs that that sacrament was not unfrequently administered in the cemeteries; and indeed there were probably several other such baptisteries in other cemeteries, for it would have been impossible that all persons should have been brought to the same. In the immediate neighbourhood of this baptistery are other paintings; but, excepting a head of our Saviour on the vault or roof over the staircase, executed on the Byzantine type, and very like that which has been described as being near the tomb of S. Cecilia, none of them require any special notice.

I say nothing of the Catacombs which are entered

from the church of San Pancrazio, because they have no special characteristic to make them worthy of a visit, unless the methodical arrangement of the graves in some portions of the galleries be thought such ; nor of those on either side of the Via Aurelia for the same reason. Of the Catacombs on the Vatican hill (which, for the interest of their historical associations, would be second to none) all vestiges have been long since destroyed in preparing the foundations of the stupendous superstructure, St. Peter's ; but, from the first, the Catacombs on that side of the Tiber can only have been small, as compared with those on the left bank of the river, in consequence of the nature of the soil in which they were excavated. We have already mentioned that this consists for the most part of marine or fluvial deposits, in which it was not easy to dig regular galleries, or to maintain them when dug. The same may be said of the first low range of hills we come to after re-crossing the river—those which skirt the Via Flaminia as it leaves the Porta del Popolo. There are Catacombs, indeed, in this hill, and we have seen those of S. Valentine illuminated on his festival, and opened to the public ; but we cannot remember that they contained anything very interesting.

As soon as we leave these deposits of sand and shells and marl, and get to the hills of volcanic formation, we come immediately upon a succession of extensive Catacombs on every public road. On the Via Salara, for instance, the Catacomb of S. Hermes, under a villa belonging to the Jesuits on the left-hand side of the road, is remarkable for the largest subterranean church that has yet been found ; also for a mosaic vaulting in the roof of one of the chapels, of coarse workmanship, but representing Daniel in the lions' den and the raising of Lazarus. The whole of this

cemetery, however, is in a ruinous condition, and requires great care and caution in visiting it.

A little further on the same road, but on the opposite side, we gain admission from the garden of the Villa Gorgolanti into the Catacomb of SS. Thraso and Saturninus. This cemetery is very extensive, but as it has no *luminare* still open, the atmosphere is unusually hot and heavy. Moreover, many of its streets are in a ruinous condition, so that it is continually necessary to ascend or descend to the different flats (of which there are four) in order to make any progress. There is no danger, however, in visiting it, and some of its peculiarities are worth seeing. It is difficult to get a correct idea of its original form, but certainly there are some parts of it which seem to have belonged to an ancient arenaria. A very large number of the graves have never been opened, and even where the tiles or marble slabs have been removed, the skeletons still remain undisturbed. Rings, also, of bone or ivory, large shells, and portions of lamps may be seen in many places, inserted in the cement whereby the gravestones were secured; and here and there a small slab of marble projects into the street, as though for the purpose of supporting a lamp, instead of making niches in the wall, according to the more general practice. I do not remember to have seen anything very remarkable in the painted chambers of this cemetery; but sometimes the graves on both sides of a gallery exhibit paintings of the usual subjects, and even the vaulted roof between them is covered with ornamental designs. In one of these portions of a street—distinguished by a very handsome shell inserted in the upper corner at one end, and one of the projecting slabs of marble of which I have spoken, at the other—we have an unusual number of subjects crowded together.

Above, are Moses striking the rock, and Christ multiplying the loaves and fishes, *i.e.* Baptism and the Holy Eucharist; below, is Daniel in the lions' den, and Tobias with his hand in the fish's mouth; whilst the intervening space is covered with Abraham sacrificing Isaac, Christ raising Lazarus, Noe receiving the dove, and the three Magi offering their gifts to the Holy Child in His mother's lap. We leave it to the taste and devotion of our readers to weave a complete and well-ordered discourse out of this combination of subjects, the interpretation of each, taken alone, having been already given elsewhere; we will only add that there is no reason to suppose that this was the grave of any famous martyr; more probably it was the burial-place of some devout and wealthy family, who could afford thus to distinguish their own tombs from those of the great mass of the people.

After visiting an *arcosolium*, ornamented with a dove and peacocks, an *orante*, or person in prayer, and the portrait of a man bearing the monumental tablet of the deceased—*Dormitio Silvestri*—the sleeping-place of Silvester,—we come to three small chambers or family vaults, leading one out of the other, and evidently excavated in succession and in consequence of an increased demand for space for burial—probably of members of the same family,—since the two inner vaults could only be made by first breaking through what were once the principal graves of their respective ante-chambers. Another painting in this cemetery also deserves mention; not for the choice of subjects, but for the size and style of execution. At either end of two long graves are the figures of two women richly dressed, and in the attitude of prayer; the head of a third woman appears also upon the shelf between the graves, and

above them is Jonas cast out of the fish and lying under the tree, together with Moses striking the rock. The remains of a large pillar of tufa, which may still be seen at the side and in front of these paintings, as before those of SS. Cornelius and Cyprian in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, suggest the idea that this may have been the shrine of some of those celebrated martyrs whom we know to have been buried in this Catacomb. In the absence, however, of any more definite observation, we prefer to abstain from conjecture, lest some future discovery should prove us to have been as false guides here as the good French archbishop *Gulielmus Bituricensis* was in the cemetery of S. Sebastian.

For the same reason we will say nothing about the supposed identification of the tomb of S. Susanna in the neighbouring Catacomb of S. Priscilla\*. The paintings in this chapel are much injured by the wet earth under which they have been buried for ages; but I cannot see that they very distinctly express any part of the history of that martyr's namesake under the old law. The chapel in which they occur is remarkable for its arabesque ornaments executed in stucco; and in a neighbouring chapel the figure of the Good Shepherd is executed in the same material. There are other paintings also in this Catacomb not very easy of explanation, as, for instance, eight men carrying a large barrel towards a place where two other barrels have already been deposited; and this is over the principal grave of a chapel whose vaulted roof contains the history of Jonas, Noe, and the Good Shepherd. In the apse

\* Known to the *custodi* as the *Cimitero del Crocefisso*, this being the ancient name of the vineyard under which it lies. It is further on in this same Via Salaria, just before the rapid descent to the river.

(so to call it) of another very fine chapel at no great distance we have, on the right, what seems to be a picture of a bishop seated in his chair, and assisted by a deacon, giving the veil to some Christian virgin ; in the middle, a much taller figure of a female stands in prayer, and, on the left, a woman seated in a chair, holding a naked infant in her arms. Bosio supposed this to be our Blessed Lady with the Holy Child ; in the central figure he recognized S. Priscilla herself, and in the other one of her daughters, S. Prassede or S. Pudenziana, consecrated to God by S. Pius, the Supreme Pontiff, assisted by S. Pastor, his companion ; and he conjectured that the whole chamber was the burial-place of S. Priscilla's family. Bottari, on the other hand, would read a regular artistic composition, representing the two different states of life, marriage and virginity ; whilst P. Garrucci, in our own day, returns to the historical interpretation of Bosio, only substituting S. Domitilla for S. Prassede, and S. Clement for S. Pius. Amid such conflicting opinions, we shall adhere to our usual practice, and state only what appears to be certain ; viz., that the ceremony of consecrating a virgin is here really represented, and that this was done in Rome, as in Africa\* and elsewhere, by placing a particular kind of veil upon the head. At the same time, our readers must not suppose that there is the same difference of opinion upon the interpretation of all, or even of many, of these subterranean paintings ; on the contrary, the ordinary representations which we find of histories taken from the Old and New Testament have their sense too clearly determined by the commentaries of the early Fathers of the Church to allow of much

\* See Optatus c. Donat. lib. vi., and S. Hieron. Ep. 23 ad Marc.

doubt and discussion. It is only in the case of those paintings of which we have but one or two examples, and on which the Fathers are altogether silent, that their sense must necessarily remain more or less doubtful and indeterminate.

But it is time that we should return to our circuit of Rome. Next to the Via Salara, there comes the Via Nomentana, and we have spoken of the Catacombs on this road at sufficient length in a former chapter. On the Via Tiburtina there is not much to detain us ; we will pass on therefore to the Via Lavicana.

At the distance of a couple of miles from the Porta Maggiore, on the left-hand side of that road, is a picturesque old ruin, commonly known by the name of Torre Pignatarra, but being really the remains of a church built by Constantine in honour of SS. Peter and Marcellinus. From this ruin Bosio found means of access to the cemetery which lay beneath, and in which those saints had been originally buried. It is very extensive, and rich in monuments of art ; or at least it was so, when first it was completed. Bosio, however, complains of the work of destruction that was going on in his time through the owners and common labourers of the vineyard, who had free access to its galleries ; and though this state of things was soon put a stop to, even before Bosio's complaints were published, yet, from whatever cause, we are no longer able to see more than half of the fourteen chapels of which that indefatigable author has preserved to us the architectural plans and paintings. Nevertheless, there is a peculiarity about some of those which remain which renders them well worthy of attention.

An idea will often occur to the diligent student of subterranean Rome, that each cemetery must have



employed its own architect and its own painter, who have left upon their works tokens of their own particular taste or talent, as distinctly as a Pugin or an Overbeck would do at the present day; at least, certain peculiarities, both architectural and pictorial, cannot fail to force themselves upon his notice, as characteristics of different cemeteries, though perhaps the true cause of this variety ought to be looked for rather in the chronology of the Catacombs, or in the shape of the hill and the nature of the soil in which they are dug, than in the private caprice of the artist employed. I must not attempt to enumerate the many and minute distinctions to which I allude; one or two, by way of example, will suffice. First, then, with reference to the arrangement of the galleries and the form of the chambers:—ordinarily the streets cross one another at right angles, or nearly so, and the chapels also are rectangular; but in the Catacomb of Sta. Cyriaca, near S. Lorenzo, on the Via Tiburtina, the galleries often diverge like so many *radii* from a common centre, and elsewhere the chapels are either round, or hexagonal, or octagonal, of more beautiful but less economical form. So in like manner with reference to the choice of subjects for painting. We have seen how, in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, symbolical representations of the Sacraments abound, while the artist employed in the cemetery of S. Priscilla, just described, seems rather to have preferred personal and historical paintings, which, for lack of contemporary documents, it is no longer easy to understand; and here, in the cemetery of SS. Peter and Marcellinus, we find a scene very frequently repeated, of which the other Catacombs scarcely furnish an example. It is the representation of the joys of heaven, under the figure of a feast, at which men, women, and children are assembled, and

Love and Peace are standing as the ministers of the entertainment. "IRENE, DA MIHI CALDA;" "AGAPE, MISCE MIHI VINUM:" "Irene, give me hot water;" "Agape, mix me some wine;" which are here written over the heads of the guests, in more than one painting, carry us back to the language of classical times and authors upon such subjects; the personification of Christian gifts and graces in the names of the servants alone suggesting the mystical and spiritual interpretation that was intended. Again, the artist was certainly more fond of drawing stags and goats than doves and lambs,—at least they are much more frequently introduced into the corners of his ceilings, over the doorways, and between the several compartments of the vault in which the Good Shepherd, Jonas, Noe, Moses, Abraham, &c., occupy their usual places. Our Blessed Lady appears in this Catacomb in three or four paintings: once she sits with her Divine Infant between two Magi who hasten to offer gifts; at another time she stands, —without her child, and having her arms stretched out in the attitude of prayer between two men who seem to be supporting them,—as Aaron and Hur supported the hands of Moses in his prayer during the battle of the children of Israel against Amalek;—and both these paintings have every mark of antiquity. This last subject is represented also on one of the gold-enamelled glasses of which we shall have occasion to speak in our next chapter; and there the names of all three are added over their heads, *Maria, Petrus, Paulus*. In another chapel are paintings of a later date, representing our Blessed Lord between S. Peter and S. Paul, and below them four of the principal saints buried in the cemetery, Petrus, Gorgonius, Marcellinus, and Tiburtius, standing two on either side of a

little hill, whence issue four streams—probably “the river of water of life” (Apoc. xxii. 1), which S. John saw in the heavenly Jerusalem, but divided into four streams, to correspond to the four rivers that went out from the earthly Paradise of our first parents. S. John tells us that this river proceeded from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and the little hill I have spoken of is here made the throne of God and of the Lamb, for on the top of it stands a lamb with a *nimbus* round his head and the monogram between A and Ω, behind him, to denote his divinity, that he is no other than “the Lamb of God,” “the beginning and the end;” and the river is called IORDAS—the river consecrated by the baptism of Jesus, and which gave its name therefore, in those early days, to the waters of all baptisteries.

About a quarter of a mile further on, in this same road, there is another Catacomb, under the Villa del Grande, known as the Catacomb of S. Helen. The only portion of this that has yet been excavated is remarkable for the grandeur of its dimensions, and for its mosaic pavement; but little or nothing is known of the probable extent of this cemetery. The Catacombs on the Via Latina are, in like manner, almost unexplored; so that we cannot recommend our readers to repeat the visits we have made there ourselves, excepting, of course, to the lately-discovered Basilica of S. Stephen, the description of which scarcely comes within the limits of our present subject. Further off, in the middle of the Campagna, somewhere below the heights of Frascati and Monte Porzio, but close to the ancient Via Lavicana, is a small cemetery of S. Zotico, with paintings of the Evangelists and others, which evidently belongs to the family of the Roman Catacombs; and there are others, at still greater distances, on different sides of

the metropolis, which those who are really anxious to master the subject in all its details will do well to visit. For ourselves, having now completed the circuit, and come back to the Via Appia, from whence we set out, we shall here take our leave of subterranean Rome, and pursue the further study of our subject by the light of day.



## CHAPTER IX.

### CHRISTIAN MUSEUMS OF ROME.

**I**T is a common subject of regret to all who visit the Catacombs, that they should have been so completely stripped of all the objects of interest which they once contained ; that the rings, seals, lamps, *ampullæ*, cups of ornamented glass, instruments of martyrdom, and, above all, the inscriptions, should not have been left, as far as possible, in their original places, where they would have been so much more appreciated than when placed amongst a multitude of heterogeneous objects in a museum. The Catacombs, however, in this respect, have only shared the lot of most other monuments of antiquity, whether Pagan or Christian ; and there is much to be said in favour of these miscellaneous collections as well as against them. A more legitimate subject of complaint, perhaps, is to be found in the imperfection of the museums themselves. Had everything which has been found in the Catacombs since their discovery in the sixteenth century been carefully brought together into one place, and properly arranged, they would have formed, as it were, an inexhaustible library for the student of Christian antiquity. As it is, these precious objects must be sought, not only in various public museums, but also in several private collections ; and very many will be sought for in vain.

The most important public collections are those at

the Vatican and Lateran Palaces ; in the museum of the Roman College, also, there is a small chamber devoted to the same purpose ; and in the Propaganda there are several objects of interest ; and a visit to the first two, at least, of these, is a necessary complement to a visit to the Catacombs. The most numerous class of objects in these museums are the small *terra-cotta* lamps, found in such abundance at the graves of the Catacombs. They are generally plain, and of an ordinary form ; many, however, are ornamented with some emblem or device,—such as the fish, the dove, the palm-branch, the monogram, the Good Shepherd, and some others ; and more rarely the whole lamp is moulded in the form of a fish or a dove, or the handle at least presents some Christian symbol. Lamps of the same form, made in bronze, and suspended from chains of the same material, are of a later date. Another class of objects in these museums, small, and (in some instances) of doubtful authenticity, is of so-called instruments of martyrdom. Some appear to be genuine ; at least, they correspond with sufficient exactness to the idea which we derive from the descriptions of the early Christian writers,—of the *ungulæ*, for example, or iron claws, with which the flesh of the martyrs was often so cruelly torn ; and of the *plumbatæ*, or leaded scourges, by which others were beaten to death. Others, however, look more like domestic utensils, and seem to be of Etruscan workmanship ; and these were probably never taken from the Catacombs at all.

In fact, in order to form a really just estimate of any object in a museum, it is necessary to know whence it was taken, as well as the circumstances under which it was found ; and this is just what it is often most difficult to ascertain. Each article has, as it were, its own history, and these it is impossible

to enter upon in a volume like the present. We can only speak generally, and direct attention to the principal objects of interest, amongst which the first place must certainly be awarded to those numerous broken chalices, or other cups of glass, which have been so often found in the Catacombs, with figures beautifully enamelled in gold, representing ordinarily some of those sacred subjects that are seen in the paintings and in sculpture.

It was thought at one time that these fragments belonged to the sacred vessels used in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and that their exact chronology could be ascertained by reference to the laws of ecclesiastical discipline, which ordered that gold or silver should be used instead of glass. A more critical examination, however, obliges us altogether to abandon this theory: Tertullian, indeed, tells us that the ancient Christians used to represent the Good Shepherd upon their chalices, and it is clear from what we read of some of the most ancient heretics, in the days of Irenæus, that glass was the material then ordinarily used. Nevertheless, the form of these glasses does not at all correspond with the ancient and traditional form of the chalice. It is true, also, that the legend which runs round the border of many of them—"ΠΙΕ ΖΗΧΗC," Drink and live,—readily lends itself to a Christian interpretation, and would at once be supposed by simple-minded Christians necessarily to refer to the Holy Eucharist. The educated student, however, need not be reminded that the same words were in common use as a social greeting or convivial exclamation in heathen banqueting. P. Garrucci, therefore, whose work upon this subject has been already mentioned, whilst altogether rejecting the theory of any sacramental use of these glasses, supposes them to have been made principally, if not exclusively, for the Christian *agapæ*, or love-feasts,

and says that he cannot account in any other way for the singular fact that none of them have ever been found except in the subterranean cemeteries of Rome. We have heard this statement of fact called in question by some who reject the theory thus founded upon it ; but though there is certainly no distinct proof with reference to every individual specimen, we must confess, on the other hand, that we have been equally unable to prove a single exception. Still, we do not feel obliged to accept Garrucci's conclusion, to which there appear to us to be insuperable objections, both external and internal. It surely is in the highest degree improbable that the knowledge of an ornamental art of this kind should have been confined to the Christian community ; we might almost say, that it was impossible it should have been so confined. Moreover, some of the figures represented, and the legends expressed, are purely Pagan, without the slightest admixture of Christianity which could lead us to appropriate them to the Church. We should be disposed, therefore, to account for their being found only in the Christian cemeteries (if it be so) from the particular opportunities which those cemeteries offered for their preservation, rather than from their having been of exclusively Christian manufacture. In the Catacombs, the flat bottoms only of these glasses are found, embedded in the surface of the mortar with which the gravestones were secured ; and in such a position there was nothing which could destroy them, unless the gravestone itself should fall to the ground, or unless some unskilful attempt were made to detach the glass from the mortar. But under other circumstances, it seems unreasonable to expect that objects so fragile should have been preserved. However, be the explanation of their origin and use what it may, they are certainly a very inter-



esting subject of study to the Christian archæologist. Bosio, who seems to have been the first to find them, only published the drawings and explanation of some five or six, to which Aringhi added about the same number. Buonarruoti, in the next century, published what was intended to be a perfect collection of all then discovered ; but they were not more than seventy ; and Boldetti, four or five years afterwards, added about thirty more. Garrucci's work contains the sketches of three hundred and twenty, and he gives more or less of a description of nearly twenty more ; so that we can now speak much more confidently than before as to those subjects which they represent, and any peculiarities in their mode of treating them.

For the most part the subjects are the same as in the earliest paintings and sculptures of the Roman Christians. A few contain the portraits of individuals, such as the Popes Callixtus and Marcellinus, and the Emperor Caracalla ; others are merely ornamented with the figures of animals, a goose, a goat, a sheep, a lion, &c. : or with the emblems and implements of some particular trade or profession—probably the trade of the owner—as a wine-seller, ship-builder, &c. ; a few are disfigured by immodest or Pagan representations ; but by far the larger portion are distinctly Christian. One of the finest of these, discovered in the Catacomb of S. Callisto, A.D. 1715, is now preserved in the museum at the Roman College, and contains a bust in the centre, with the legend “ZHSSES,” mayest thou live ; and all round the border are the following subjects : the young Tobias, with his hand in the inside of the fish which he has caught, preparing to obey the angel's directions respecting it ; our Lord touching with His wonder-working rod the paralytic who carries his bed on his shoulders ; our

Lord, again, stretching out the same rod towards the three children standing in the fiery furnace; and, once more, with the same rod touching the seven watering-pots of water. It is to be observed that our Lord often appears in these glasses bearing the rod in his hand, not only in the working of miracles, but also in many scenes taken from the Old Testament in which He is either not represented at all or is represented without the rod in all the paintings and sculptures; as, for instance, standing by the side of Daniel in the lions' den, and elsewhere. This bringing together of the histories of the Old and New Testaments, and representing our Blessed Lord as equally concerned and personally present in both, was doubtless a confession of faith in His Divinity; it was an expression, in painting and by symbols, of that truth which Justin Martyr puts plainly into words, and insists upon in one of his treatises, with reference to the heroes of the Ancient Law, or at least with reference to one of them, Josue; viz., that they performed all their good and valiant deeds through the strength which they received from the spirit of Christ.\* And this little detail of internal evidence falls in very well with the conclusion which P. Garrucci arrives at from other causes; viz., that most of these glasses belong to the fourth century. The monogram is of very frequent occurrence in them, and even the Alpha and Omega appear once or twice on either side of the monogram. The most famous saints and martyrs of the Roman Church, and a few also of other more distant Churches, were often painted or traced upon the gold leaf of these cups, more especially SS. Peter and Paul, as the joint founders of the Roman Church, S. Agnes and S. Lawrence; and from the African

\* Contra Tryphon. c. 113.

Church, S. Cyprian and others. SS. Peter and Paul sometimes stand side by side, without any figure or emblem, but plainly identified by their names ; sometimes Christ stands above or between them, giving them a volume, or placing a crown on each of their heads, or one crown hangs suspended between both ; or they are separated by our Blessed Lady, or some other saint is between them, as S. Agnes ; or one of the Apostles stands alone, as where Peter is striking the rock.

In like manner, S. Agnes, too, sometimes stands alone, or her Divine spouse is crowning her ; or she stands between two doves, each carrying a crown in its beak, according to what Prudentius\* has sung of this virgin saint and her double crown of virginity and martyrdom ; or she stands by the side of our Blessed Lady, or with our Lord. In other cases a number of saints, of various countries and ages, are represented all round the border of the glass ; and it is not easy to discover the principle on which they have been selected. Probably they were the patron saints of those for whom the glass was made or to whom it was given ; for we can scarcely err in supposing some, at least, to have been made for use on certain special solemnities, as, for instance, on occasion of a marriage, of which there are many examples. The *sposi* are joining hands over a pillar or altar, and Christ stands between and above them, crowning them, or the monogram is put there in His stead, and the pious aspiration is added *Vivatis in Deo*,—May you live in God. Once, indeed, Cupid appears in the place of our Lord ; and though we cannot but condemn the change, I am not sure that we can found any argument upon it as to the religious belief of the

\* Peristeph. xiv. 7, 119.

young married couple, since there are many, probably, among Christian artists at the present day, who would see no impropriety in making a similar representation.

The figures of Adam and Eve, Noe in his ark, of Daniel, and of Jonas, and indeed all the other Scriptural subjects painted on these glasses, do not seem to call for any special comment ; and it is beside our present purpose to speak of the few subjects that are Pagan. The student can easily procure the work of P. Garucci, which in the fidelity of its drawings leaves nothing to desire ; and in another work,\* edited by the same author, may be seen a few rings and ancient Christian gems, illustrated by learned commentaries. Objects of this small size, however, cannot be seen and handled by the many for whom we write ; we must be content, therefore, to pass them over in silence, and shall devote the small remainder of our space to an examination of the early Christian epitaphs with which the Catacombs have so abundantly supplied us.

\* *Hagioglypta ; sive, Picturæ, &c., explicatæ a Joanne Macario.* Paris : J. A. Toulouse, 1856.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE CATACOMBS.



Y far the most important class of objects belonging to the Catacombs, and now to be seen in the museums, consists of the stones or marble slabs having inscriptions engraved upon them. These precious monuments of antiquity it is scarcely possible to overestimate. Unfortunately, however, the collections are very imperfect, having been made only in recent times, when large numbers had been already scattered to distant parts of the world, and a still larger number had perished altogether. Many, and often the most valuable, had been given to learned antiquarians or devout ecclesiastics, who coveted them for their own possession, without reflecting upon the grievous injury which they were thus inflicting upon those who came after them; others, again, were injudiciously placed, even by persons who knew their value and were anxious for their preservation, in the pavements of churches, where—as might have been expected—they have either gradually been effaced by the constant tread of worshippers, or thoughtlessly removed, and so lost sight of altogether, on occasion of some subsequent restoration of that portion of the church.

It is to the Sovereign Pontiffs that we are principally indebted for whatever fragments have been preserved from the general wreck. As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, Pope Nicholas V.

seems to have entertained the idea of collecting all the lapidarian monuments of early Christianity which had at that time been discovered ; and both Eugenius IV., his immediate predecessor, and Calixtus III., who succeeded him, forbade, under heavy penalties, the alienation or destruction of anything belonging to this class of monuments. When Leo X., too, appointed Raphael to superintend the works at the rebuilding of St. Peter's, he gave him a special charge that the *res lapidaria* should not be injured. In later times these injunctions became more earnest and more frequent, in proportion to the increasing number and importance of the inscriptions that were brought to light. Still, nothing appears to have been done beyond the constant repetition of these prohibitions, until the reign of Benedict XIV., who appointed the learned Francesco Branchini to collect all the sepulchral stones that could be found ; and it was he who recommended the long narrow gallery leading to the Vatican library and museum as a convenient place for their preservation. Even then, political and other difficulties interfered to prevent the execution of the design, so that it was not until the close of the last century that it was really carried out by Gaetano Marini, under the orders of Pope Pius VI.

It is of importance that these facts should be known, because ignorance of them has led some writers to speak of the Lapidarian Gallery (as it is called) as though it were a selection of the most ancient, curious, and valuable inscriptions that have ever been found in the Catacombs ; and they have then gone on to argue that this selection, "made under Papal superintendence and arranged by the hands of modern Romanists," contains "a distinction, virtually drawn by themselves, between what belongs

to a pure age and what to the times of innovation ;”\* so that, if there be any Catholic doctrine or practice of which no trace can here be found, it may at once be rejected as a modern corruption. Of the irrelevancy of this argument we may have something to say hereafter ; at present let the fact be carefully borne in mind that the Lapidarian Gallery contains no *selection* of monuments whatever, but is merely a gathering together of all that had not otherwise been disposed of before the time of Benedict XIV. Marini did not even take pains to make the most of the materials he had. He merely inserted the monuments in the wall (about twelve or thirteen hundred in number), without giving any indication of the places where they had been found, or making any attempt to classify them, beyond separating the few which contain the names of the consuls from those which are without this chronological note. A real selection of inscriptions is being now made, far more carefully, by the Cavaliere de Rossi, in a gallery of the Lateran Palace, adjoining the Christian Museum. It will necessarily be very imperfect, both for the reasons already given, and because he has no authority to interfere with the private collections already existing, in the museums of the Roman College, for example, or of the Capitol ; in the cloisters of S. Paul, S. Gregory, and S. Lawrence, *fuori le mura* ; or in the porticos of S. Mark, Sta. Maria in Trastevere, &c. This selection is being made whilst we write ; and as yet there are whole columns empty, and scarcely any complete. The whole plan, however, is sufficiently clear, and we will proceed to give some account of it, when we have first visited the Vatican.

The greater portion of these epitaphs were cut in

\* We quote from Dr. Maitland.

the stone or marble slabs with which the tombs were closed ; others were rudely traced with the sharp end of the trowel in the mortar with which those slabs were secured ; and in some few the letters are not cut at all, but only written on the surface with red paint, or, more rarely, with charcoal. Most of them are Latin, and written in Latin letters ; some also are Greek, and written according to the Greek alphabet ; whilst not a few display a singular confusion both of the languages and alphabets. This circumstance is easily accounted for, when we remember that Rome was at that time the metropolis of the world ; that a large proportion of the Roman slaves was brought from Asia Minor and other parts of Greece ; and that whereas it is always comparatively easy to acquire the habit of conversing in the language of those around us, it requires both ability and application to learn to *write* a foreign language correctly, more especially if it be encumbered with the additional difficulty of a strange alphabet.

The precise date of each particular inscription is obviously a point of considerable importance ; and it is no less obvious that it is impossible to enter upon it here. It can only be said of the inscriptions of the Catacombs in general, that their chronology ranges from the latter end of the first to the early part of the fifth century of our era, the Catacombs having continued during that period to be the common Christian burial-ground of Rome. Of course the *most* certain—some might be disposed to say the *only* sure—means of ascertaining the date of any particular inscription, are the names of the consuls ; but these are rarely found, antecedently to the conversion of the Empire. Other indications, less secure, but varying in value from mere conjecture to the highest degree of probability, or even moral certainty,



are such as these: the place in which the stone was found, whether in a higher or lower *piano* of the cemetery, near the entrance, or deep in the interior, the date of any coins which may have been found attached to that or to adjacent tombs; and generally, any peculiarity whatever, either in the form of speech or in the character of the writing. These, however, are particulars which can only be safely trusted when they are the result of very careful examination; nor can their logical value be otherwise shown than by an extensive induction of examples, altogether inconsistent with the limits of such a volume as the present.

For the same reason we shall pass over many details of philological interest, which a careful study of these inscriptions could not fail to afford; such as happy illustrations of the decay of the Latin tongue, and even some details of high antiquarian value, but which are not likely to command the general interest of our readers. We propose to confine our attention to two things,—first, the principal points of resemblance or of contrast between the Christian inscriptions and the corresponding monuments of Paganism; and secondly, any traces we may be able to detect of the faith or temper of mind of those by whom, or for whom, these Christian inscriptions were made. To the latter of these tasks we are irresistibly attracted by its own intrinsic interest, and a visit to the Lateran will give us all the materials we need; to the former we seem, as it were, to be directly invited every time we visit the Lapidarian collection at the Vatican, where the Christian and the Pagan monuments stand facing each other on opposite sides of the same gallery, as if for the express purpose of challenging comparison.

The first thing which strikes us, in studying this mass of monumental inscriptions, is the invocation,

or, to speak more correctly, the dedication, to the *Dî Manes*, the Θεοὶ Καταχθόνιοι, which is universally prefixed to heathen epitaphs, but is of course absent from those of the Christians; a difference which at once proclaims a different religious belief.\* This difference is equally proclaimed by the formula *in pace*, which stand at the end of the Christian inscriptions almost as universally as *Dîs Manibus* stands at the beginning of the heathen ones; and in conjunction with this should be mentioned also the different *words* by which the acts of *death* and of *burial* are expressed in the two classes of monuments. A heathen *defunctus est, reddidit naturæ debitum, abreptus est*; a Christian *dormit, quiescit*. A heathen is *situs, conditus, positus, compositus*, in his sarcophagus or grave; a Christian is *depositus*. The precise force of these distinctions will be more properly explained in another place; I mention them now, because they lie on the very surface of our subject, forcing themselves upon our notice the moment we have read some half-dozen inscriptions of either class.

The next point, probably, which would attract the attention of the careful student, is the very subdued and moderate expressions of grief to which the Christian survivor ventures to give utterance, as compared with the violent outbursts of passion in which the heathen not unfrequently indulged. Among the latter, a bereaved parent or

\* D. M., or Θ. Κ., has been found on some *few* Christian inscriptions, and there have been authors who would fain interpret them as being intended for *Deo Magno* and Θεῷ Κτιστῇ; this, however, is manifestly inadmissible. They are best explained by supposing them to have been thoughtlessly used by persons who, seeing them universally prefixed to heathen tombstones, did not stop to consider their meaning. They are not found on any Christian inscription after the beginning of the fourth century.

widower pours forth most bitter reproaches, or even raves with uplifted hands against the Gods who have robbed them of the cherished object of their love; among the former, I do not remember ever to have met with a stronger expression of sorrow than is implied in the single word *dolens*; and even this is comparatively rare, and in a very few instances (of parents burying their children) *immerentes*; whilst in others resignation to the will of God is distinctly, though briefly and very touchingly, expressed; *e. g.*:—

ADEODATE DIGNÆ ET MERITÆ VIRGINI; ET QUIESCIT HIC IN PACE, JVBENTE XPO EJVS.

“To Adeodata, a worthy and well-deserving virgin; and she rests here in peace, *her Christ commanding her.*”

Another distinction between the two classes of inscriptions, less obvious perhaps, but still more worthy of notice, is to be found in what I may venture to call the *total* absence from Christian epitaphs of all those titles of rank and dignity with which Pagan monuments are so commonly overloaded. Excepting the titles which denote the various degrees of the Christian hierarchy, and of which I shall have occasion to speak presently, scarcely any can be seen; only a very few belonging to military rank, and those, for the most part, of a date subsequent to the conversion of the empire. Some perhaps may be disposed to account for this remarkable fact by an appeal to those words of the Apostle,\* “Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, hath God chosen;” or, in other words, the Christian epitaphs of the first four centuries contain no pompous enu-

\* 1 Cor. i. 26.

meration of worldly ranks and dignities, because no such rank and dignity had really belonged to those whose deaths are commemorated. But this would be to speak too hastily and too universally; the Apostle does not tell us that *not one* of the mighty or the noble was to be found in the early Church, and ecclesiastical history furnishes us with direct proofs of the contrary, more especially in the city of Rome; yet the inscriptions in the Catacombs tell us of none. Moreover, there is another class of titles, the most frequent of all in heathen burial-places, yet equally rare in a Christian cemetery, whose absence cannot be thus accounted for; I allude to *servus*, *libertus*, and other words of the same class, which have reference to that great social division of the ancient world into freemen and slaves. One cannot study a dozen monuments of Pagan Rome without reading something of *servus* or *libertus*, "*libertis libertabusque posterisque eorum*;" and I believe the proportion in which they are found is about three out of every four. Yet, in a number of Christian inscriptions in Rome exceeding eleven thousand, and all belonging to the first six centuries of our era, scarcely six have been found containing any allusion whatever—and even two or three of these are doubtful—to this fundamental division of ancient Roman society.

No one, we think, will be rash enough to maintain, either that this omission is the result of mere accident, or that no individual slave or freedman was ever buried in the Catacombs. Rather, these two cognate facts, the absence from ancient Christian epitaphs of all titles of rank and honour on the one hand, or of disgrace and servitude on the other, can only be adequately explained by an appeal to the religion of those who made them. The children of the primitive Church did not record upon their monuments titles of earthly dignity, because they

knew that with the God whom they served "there was no respect of persons;" neither did they care to mention the fact of their bondage, or of their deliverance from bondage, to some earthly master, because they thought only of that higher and more perfect liberty wherewith Christ had set them free; remembering that "he that was called, being a bondman, was yet the freeman of the Lord, and likewise he that was called being free was still the bondman of Christ."

And this conclusion is still further confirmed by another remarkable fact which should be mentioned; namely, that there are not wanting in the inscriptions from the Catacombs numerous examples of another class of persons, sometimes ranked among slaves, but the mention of whose servitude, such as it was, served rather to record an act of Christian charity than any social degradation,—I allude to the *alumni*, or foundlings, as they may be called. The laws of Pagan Rome assigned these victims of their parents' crimes or poverty to be the absolute property of any one who would take charge of them. As nothing, however, but compassion could move a man to do this, children thus acquired were not called *servi*, as though they were slaves who had been bought with money; nor *vernæ*, as though they had been the children of slaves and born in the house; but *alumni*, a name simply implying that they had been brought up (*ab alendo*) by their owners. Now it is a very singular fact, that there are actually more instances of *alumni* among the sepulchral inscriptions of Christians than among the infinitely more numerous sepulchral inscriptions of Pagans; showing clearly that this was an act of charity to which the early Christians were much addicted; and the *alumni*, when their foster-parents died,

very properly and naturally recorded upon their tombs this act of charity, to which they were themselves so deeply indebted.\*

It need hardly be mentioned that brevity and simplicity are the especial characteristics of epitaphs in the Catacombs. Very commonly the name of the deceased stands quite alone, or only with the addition of the Christian formula, "in peace," or "in God;" or, if anything be added more personally descriptive of the individual, it is no extravagant panegyric of virtues which never existed, such as too frequently deface the monuments of modern days, but a short and simple memorial, dictated by a spirit of love, and breathing the language of faith and hope. "Well-deserving," "faithful," "servants of God;" these are the ordinary titles bestowed indifferently upon all ranks and ages of the Christian dead; or occasionally something more distinctive; such as, "*amicus omnium, amator pauperum*," &c.—"friend of all, lover of the poor:" of husbands and wives, it is specified that they were not unmindful of the numerous apostolic exhortations, but had lived together in uninterrupted harmony and peace,—"*semper concordēs*," "*sine lesione animi*," "*sine ullā querelā*;" women, both married and unmarried, are commended for their chastity and modesty, and children for their amiability and innocence, sometimes in plain and simple language, at other times under beautiful figures and illustrations: "*Anima dulcis et innocens, parvulus innocens; agnellus Dei; agnella innocens; palumba sine felle; palumbulus sine felle*," and the like—"Sweet and innocent soul; little lamb of God; an innocent lamb; a dove without gall," &c.

\* See De Rossi's letter *de Christianis Titulis Carthaginiensibus*, in the 4th volume of the *Spicilegium Solesmense*, p. 497.

Did not matters of graver moment await us, we would gladly prolong our investigation of these relics of the early Church, under that aspect in which alone we have hitherto considered them; viz., in their general characteristic features as distinguished from the similar relics of heathenism; and by so doing we should glean much interesting information. Those who know—and who does not?—how fascinating it is to spell out the monumental legends of an ordinary English churchyard, may imagine what it is to spend hours upon hours, or even days upon days and months upon months, in spelling out the legends of the great churchyard of primitive Roman Christianity.

For these speak no merely conventional language, as of public monuments, but rather are written as their authors might have written in their private diaries, or in letters to their most intimate friends. Here a sorrowing mother records the death of her virgin daughter on the thirteenth anniversary of her birth; there a young widower laments that his many travels had prevented his enjoying the society of his wife, excepting for six months of the two years during which they had been married; or another records that his wife had lived with him for fifteen years (*sine lesione animi*) without ever giving offence, and that she bore him seven sons, four of whom *secum habet ad Dominum*—are now with her in the presence of God: here lies an infant of two years old, who died *inter manus parentorum*—in his parents' arms; there a young man who lived twenty years and seven months, and always lived most innocently with his parents; and so on, through an endless variety of domestic or personal details, each, indeed, in itself peculiar to the individual to whom it originally referred, yet, when taken altogether, fur-

nishing no mean or obscure tokens of the spirit and temper which pervaded the whole body to which those individuals belonged.

It is time, however, that we should now direct our inquiries into another channel, and see whether we cannot gather from the same monuments some traces of the means, whether outward or inward, by which this temper was produced and fostered ; or, in other words, whether we cannot find some traces, either of the dogmatic teaching or the sacramental rites of the early Church ; and for this purpose we will proceed to the gallery of the Lateran Palace, where the admirable arrangement of the inscriptions will materially assist us in our search.

We may pass over the first two columns, which are intended for inscriptions of a public and monumental character, such as *ex-voto* offerings to S. Agnes, S. Sebastian, and other martyrs, and the inscription\* of Pope Damasus, recording his having drained the cemetery on the Vatican Hill, and his (somewhat quaint) reasons for doing it. The third column contains a few specimens of the inscriptions with which the same pope ornamented the tombs of the principal martyrs, as also the very inferior copy which was made of one of them at a later period ; that of S. Eusebius, already mentioned in our visit to the cemetery of S. Callisto ; and the inscription of Pope Vigilius, which explains the occasion and necessity of such copies having been made. We come next to three or four columns of inscriptions bearing their own chronology upon the face of them, by means of the names of the magistrates. De Rossi has wisely translated these consular dates into the corresponding A.D., and added under each inscription the place

\* The original is in the subterranean of St. Peter's.



from which it was taken ; so that both the learned and the unlearned may be the better able to appreciate the details of information they contain. It is not our intention, however, to detain our readers upon these monuments ; we pass on to the eighth and ninth columns, where the superscription announces to us that we shall find a collection of epitaphs, remarkable for some peculiarity of expression, denoting, more or less distinctly, an article of the Christian faith. In these we are all interested ; neither is there any need of argument to insist upon their value and importance. Nevertheless, it may be worth while to pause for a single moment, just to inquire what amount of proof, and upon what class of subjects, we have a right to look for in monuments of this kind. It has been already noticed that some writers have attempted to draw inferences hostile to certain articles of the faith from the supposed silence of early Christian epitaphs about them. But is it usual, then, that every man who is buried should have a full profession of his faith engraved upon his tombstone ? Do sepulchral monuments ordinarily contain a distinct enunciation of all the theological dogmas of the age to which they belong ? or is a churchyard the place to which we naturally turn when we seek materials for a treatise on Christian doctrine or on ecclesiastical discipline ?

On the other hand, we are far from denying but that, when there is an opportunity of comparing together a considerable number of monuments, all belonging to the same age, or place, or class, we may reasonably expect to gather from such comparison many important details concerning the principal features, whether moral, social, or religious, by which that class, place, or age, was characterized. It is precisely in this way that we have been endeavouring

to draw some conclusions, and now propose to draw others, from the inscriptions of the Catacombs. We only protest against building any argument upon the *silence*, real or supposed, of those inscriptions. In all that they say, let their testimony be received, and with that reverence which is justly its due; but let no man pretend that we are bound to reject as of later date whatever they cannot be proved to contain.

The only matter on which, as it seems to me, we have a right to expect anything like copious and positive information from the sepulchral monuments of a people, is their belief concerning the condition and prospects of those to whom the monuments were erected, and the relations (if any) which still exist between them and their survivors. And certainly, upon both these points the inscriptions from the Catacombs are, as we shall presently see, abundantly explicit. Upon other matters affecting the Christian community, whether in its sacramental rites, its internal constitution, or its dogmatic teaching, nothing precise and definite can reasonably be looked for. It will be much if they shall be found to contain some incidental hint or slight allusion, which, in the hands of learned commentators, may happily confirm or illustrate knowledge previously received from other independent sources. And here, also, the inscriptions with which we are at present concerned are far from being deficient.

Let me take, as an example—the only one to which, in my present limits, I could hope to do justice—the various classes or orders of persons of whom the whole Church is constituted. First, there is the great general division into clergy and laity; and then each of these may be subdivided within itself. Now, with regard to the various orders of clergy, it is scarcely too much to say that, even if all the writings

of the Fathers had altogether perished, we might almost reconstruct the whole fabric of the ecclesiastical polity from the scattered notices contained in these sepulchral inscriptions. *Bishop, priest, deacon, sub-deacon, acolyte, exorcist, and lector*, each of all these have their several memorials amid the tombstones of subterranean Rome.\* How little did Calvin dream, when he asked with such scornful confidence, “Where, in the monuments of Christian antiquity, do we ever read or hear of your exorcists?” that he might even then himself have visited their graves and read their epitaphs in the most ancient cemeteries of the Roman Church; as, for instance, in the cemetery of San Callisto, where, in the floor of one of the chapels, the inscription still remains, “PAULUS EXORCISTA DEPOSITUS MARTYRIES,”—“Paul, the exorcist, buried at (or near) the martyrs.”

And besides those several grades of the clergy which have been enumerated, and which are still retained amongst us, we find notices of *other* ranks or offices, which arose from the peculiar circumstances of the times, and have therefore since either altogether ceased, or at least suffered considerable modifications; such as *fossores* and *notarii*, those who dug the graves and buried the dead, and those who compiled the Acts of the Martyrs and other ecclesiastical records.

From clerics we turn naturally to the thought of consecrated members of the other sex, virgins and widows; and about these, too, the Catacombs are not silent. Thus, we read of a *virgo devota, virgo Dei, ancilla Dei, virgo votis deposita*; and still more distinctly, of a *matrona vidua Dei*, and of another widow, named Dafne, *who never burdened the Church*.

\* They may all be seen in column x. of the collection at the Lateran Museum.

The fragment of this inscription at the Lateran\* is very imperfect, and very badly written and spelt; *e. g. Aclesia nill gravavit*. There is another, however, belonging to the same class, in the chapel of the Albani Villa outside the Porta Salara, which leaves no doubt whatever as to the meaning of both of them. It speaks of one Regina, a widow, *unibyra* (for *univira*), *i. e.*, the wife of one husband, who *sat*—evidently a legal or technical term, denoting the existence of a special *class* of widows,—“who sat a widow for sixty years, *et Ecclesiam nunquam gravavit*:” *i. e.*, although she belonged to the number of those from whom S. Paul directed that the widows should be chosen,† yet she did not therefore avail herself of her privilege of being maintained by the Church, but chose rather to follow the example of the Apostle in not being chargeable to any, “She never burdened the Church,” says her daughter in the epitaph, using the precise word which S. Paul had used, both about himself and about this very subject: “If any of the faithful have widows, let him minister to them, and *let not the Church be charged*,”—“*Et non gravetur Ecclesia*.”

Nor are these the only members of the household of faith, of whom we learn from Scripture or from ecclesiastical tradition, that they were distinguished from the great mass of the community by certain names and titles, and whom we find thus specially designated in the monuments at present under consideration. Thus, we know that those who had but recently been admitted into the Church by baptism were called neophytes;‡ that the grace of baptism was also called by the title of *illumination*, and that those who were only being prepared for the reception

\* It stands No. 3, in column xi.

† 1 Tim. v. 9.

‡ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

of that sacrament were called *catechumens*; and all these titles are to be found in the Catacombs: "Here lies Achilla, *newly illuminated*;" "Here rests Andragathus, a Greek, a *catechumen*;" "Here rest two innocent brothers, Constantius, a *neophyte*, and Justus, one of the faithful," &c.

These examples might suffice to illustrate the way in which much valuable information is often incidentally given by these inscriptions upon matters which might have been thought foreign to their immediate end; we will venture, however, to add yet one more, both for its own sake, and also because, according to the very excellent method followed by De Rossi in his arrangement of these inscriptions at the Lateran, it is the first which occurs to us, when we proceed to examine them from a dogmatical point of view. The accidental circumstances of local controversy may indeed give a fictitious prominence to other doctrines; but the first and most fundamental question which can ever be asked with respect to any religious system, concerns of course the object of its worship; and upon this subject, therefore, we are naturally anxious to inquire whether the Christian cemeteries of Rome give us any certain information. The first dozen of inscriptions which De Rossi has placed at the head of his *dogmatical* selection\* answer very distinctly, with reference to one point at least; viz., that the Christians worshipped Christ, and believed Him to be the very God. His name is either accompanied by an express declaration of His divinity, or it is joined with the name of God, or it is put in the place of the name of God, in various ways; as, for instance, we read in one place, *εν Θεω Κυρειω Χρειστω*,—in the Lord God Christ; or *in D. Christo*, or *in Christo Deo*,—in

\* *I.e.* in column viii.

God Christ ; if, in another place, we read *in nomine Dei*,—in the name of God,—we have not far to search before we find, in a third place, *in nomine Christi*, as its manifest equivalent. The name of Christ, under one of its most common ancient forms, expressing His divine Sonship, is also to be found at the beginning or ending of some of these epitaphs ; *e.g.*  $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma$ .\*

This information may seem but very meagre on a subject of such vast importance to those who would fain find proof of everything in these numerous, but short and (as it were) accidental memorials of primitive Christianity. Those, however, who have appreciated our prefatory remarks as to the essential characteristics of monumental inscriptions, will, we think, be abundantly satisfied with this confirmation of their creed, so unexpectedly given by a voice from the dead. At any rate, we are not at present in a condition to add to it ; and we shall now proceed to that part of Christian doctrine, upon which, as we have said, we have a right to look for more direct and more abundant testimony ; viz., the condition of the dead, and the relations between the dead and the living.

We have already seen how the Christian vocabulary, for everything connected with death and burial, differed essentially from that of the heathen ; and this difference arose, of course, from the Christian's hope and faith in a future resurrection. The Catacombs themselves were known only by the name of *cemeteries*, or sleeping-places ; a single chamber in them was a *cubiculum*, which also denoted a bedroom ; each body, as it was laid in its grave, was said to be *depositum* there ; deposited, that is, only for a while, to be reclaimed again in that day when the sea and the earth shall give up their dead ; and finally,

\* In Nos. 12 and 13. For the meaning of this title see page 65.

it was announced concerning the deceased, that he slept in peace; *slept*, to be awaked again when the last trumpet shall sound. The precise meaning of those ever-recurring words, "*In pace*," has formed the subject of much learned, and sometimes angry discussion. Some authors, for instance, would understand it according to the strict ecclesiastical sense of the word in ancient times, when applied to the reconciliation of sinners or heretics; *i.e.*, they see in it a clear and certain proof of communion with the Church; whereas, it happens that in a *cubiculum* apparently\* belonging to the only heretical Catacomb with which we are acquainted in the neighbourhood of Rome, the inscription round one of the graves runs thus, *Acuti in pace; Acuti in pace*; repeated four or five times. Others, again, have supposed it to contain a secret contrast with the troubles and sufferings of the Christian life during those ages of persecution; but these have forgotten that the same phrase was in use amongst the Jews before Christianity began, and was continued by Christians after persecution had ceased. A third interpretation, therefore, simply fills up the formula according to modern practice, and understands it always to imply a prayer for the deceased, *Requiescat in pace*; against which it is to be observed that the phrase, as found in the inscriptions from the Catacombs, is often not elliptical at all, and that the verb which is used is often in the indicative, not in the imperative or optative mood. "He sleeps," or "he lies in peace," is, as far as I

\* We say *apparently*, because, in the present state of the excavations, it seems scarcely possible to define the precise limits of the Catacomb to which we allude, and of which we have spoken in page 112. Perhaps the *cubiculum* is really Christian; and the proximity of the heretical monuments was the reason of this unusual repetition of the Christian formula in question.

know, the *only* formula to be found in those Jewish epitaphs in which the words occur at all; and the same form is not uncommon in Christian epitaphs also. What solution, then, shall we offer of this much-controverted question? On a former occasion, we expressed our belief that here, as in so many other matters of litigation, the truth would be found to lie in a combination of the various conflicting theories, rather than in the unqualified adoption of any, to the exclusion of the others. We were inclined to think that all these opinions were true so far as they are affirmative; all false, so far as they are negative. We said that in some inscriptions, *pax* would seem certainly to denote ecclesiastical communion; as, for instance, where a man is said to have *recessisse in pace*, *reddidisse in pace Dñi*, and the like; and how should it not be so, when we know from the writings of Tertullian, S. Cyprian, and other of the earliest fathers, how universally *pax* was used in this sense, of Christians yet living? On the other hand, we thought it no less certain that the word sometimes referred only to the *bodily* rest of death,—*dormit in somno pacis*, &c.; and we quoted authority for it from the book of Ecclesiasticus\* —“Corpora eorum in pace sepulta sunt;” and the words of the royal Psalmist, “In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam?” And, thirdly, we said that no candid man could venture to deny but that it was in many instances a prayer for the deceased, that his soul might be in everlasting peace; since it is distinctly expressed over and over again, *dormi in pace*, *in pacem estote*, *quiesce in pace*, *vivas in pace*; and more frequently still, perhaps, without any verb at all, *Te in pace*, where the accusative case requires us to supply a verb that may govern it, and where

\* xliv. 11.



Lupi, Mazochi, and other learned antiquarians, seem to me rightly to recognize the beginning of some hymn or other well-known liturgical formula, analogous to our *Requiem æternam*, or our *Suscipiat te Christus*,—a conjecture, I may observe, which receives no little confirmation from an inscription that has been found, “*Gaudentia suscipiatur in pace ;*” and another, part of which runs thus, “*cujus spiritum in refrigerium suscipiat Dnus.* ;”—“and may the Lord receive his spirit into refreshment.” We wrote thus much on this controverted subject, on the faith of our own imperfect acquaintance with the sepulchral monuments of primitive Christianity. At present we are able to speak both more positively and more distinctly, on the authority of the Cavaliere di Rossi, who has shown in a recent letter\* on certain Christian inscriptions discovered in Africa, that there is a manifest difference between the sense in which these words (*in pace*) were used by the Christians of Rome, and that which they had in the mouths of other Christians, as, for instance, of Africa. Of the epitaphs of Rome, in which the words occur, he considers that their authors had always in mind the peace of a joyful resurrection and a happy eternity ; not of course altogether and necessarily excluding the idea of that peace and reconciliation with God which is to be enjoyed in this world in the communion of the Church, and which is, as it were, a prelude and preparation for the peace that shall never end hereafter, yet at the same time not distinctly thinking of or expressing it. And in corroboration of this, he points out the choice of verbs that is made wherever the phrase is not in any way abbreviated ; how they invariably have reference to the present or future condition of the deceased, rather than to his

\* Vide *Spicilegium Solesmense*, tom. iv. p. 497.

past life. In the few Christian inscriptions which have come to us from Africa, on the contrary, we have already several examples of these words being coupled with the verb *vixit*; that is to say, it is not asserted concerning the deceased, that he sleeps in peace now, neither is it a subject of prayer for him that he may live in peace hereafter; but it is said that he *has* lived in peace for so many years and so many months; and this we naturally understand of the peace and communion of the Catholic Church. If any of our readers should be disposed to think that this difference of expression is too feeble a foundation on which to rest an argument, we would invite his attention to the very remarkable circumstance insisted upon by De Rossi; viz., that in the very few exceptions which exist against the rule we have laid down with regard to the use of these words in Roman epitaphs, we are able to show that most of them at least, if not all, though found in Roman cemeteries, did not really belong to Roman Christians. Among more than eleven thousand Roman inscriptions, there are only eleven in which the deceased is said to have *lived in peace*: of one of these, the epitaph specifies that he was a Spaniard; of another, that he was a foreigner (*peregrinus*), not a Roman; in a third, the same thing is evidenced by the name of the deceased, Freda; and in a fourth, by the mixture of Greek and Latin words, and of Latin words written in Greek characters. Even the orthography of a fifth scarcely leaves room for doubt; so that, as De Rossi says, it seems perfectly demonstrated that this use of the words *in pace*, as denoting communion with the Catholic Church, in opposition to all schism or heresy, whilst perfectly familiar to the Christians of Africa, was almost unknown to the writers of Christian epitaphs in Rome: and I think no one can

fail to recognize the justice of his remark, that the different histories of the two Churches abundantly account for the different tones of thought and manner of expression. In Africa, the Donatist schism, followed so immediately by the Arian heresy, brought in by the Vandals, naturally caused the minds of all good Christians to dwell in an especial manner upon the blessed privilege of communion with that Church to which now, as at the beginning, "the Lord added daily such as should be saved." Among all the topics of Christian consolation which served to moderate the sorrow of a bereaved relative, this, assuredly, in the actual circumstances of the African Church, was not the least; viz., that the deceased had not forsaken the one true fold—that he had lived and died a Catholic. In Rome, on the contrary, where no schism or heresy could succeed in gaining any permanent footing, where (to speak generally) all Christians were Catholics, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the fact of communion with the Church should have been tacitly assumed, rather than distinctly declared, in the short and simple memorials of the dead, and that the thoughts and prayers of the survivors should have been entirely removed from this lower world, passed beyond the portals of the grave, and only sought eternal peace in heaven for all who had departed.

But we have been insensibly wandering from our subject, or at least in some danger of losing sight of the precise point which we proposed to consider; viz., the general fact proved by the inscriptions of the Catacombs, that prayers were offered for the dead, and the various forms of words in which those prayers were expressed.

There are those who contend that what we call prayers for the dead are not, strictly speaking, an act of

religion at all, but mere idle exclamations, unavailing expressions of goodwill, regret, and affection, such as the heathens themselves sometimes indulged in on their epitaphs. But what are the facts of the case? Will it be allowed that the following are fair specimens of prayers for the dead?—

“Remember, O Lord, Thy servants who have gone before us, and who sleep in the sleep of peace ;

“Give them a place of refreshment, blessedness of rest, and clearness of light ;

“Vouchsafe to unite them to the company of Thy saints.”

Here we have four or five different forms of speech. Are they prayers for the dead, or are they not? If it be said that they are *not*, then we answer that we have no others ; these are themselves the very prayers which we use in our daily Mass, or on the anniversaries of the deceased. If it be allowed that they *are* prayers, then we answer that there is not one of them to which we cannot furnish an exact parallel from the inscriptions of the Roman Catacombs.

“Remember, O Lord, Thy servants who have gone before us, and who sleep in the sleep of peace.” Thus we pray each day for our departed friends in the canon of the Mass, and thus prayed the early Christians also :—


ΑΥΡ. ΑΙΛΙΑΝΟΣ ΠΑΦΛΑΓΩΝ ΘΕΟΥ  
ΔΟΥΛΟΣ ΠΙΣΤΟΣ  
ΕΚΟΙΜΗΘΗ ΕΝ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΜΝΗΣΘΗ ΑΥΤΟΥ  
Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΙΩΝΑΣ.

“Aurelius Ælianus, of Paphlagonia, a faithful servant of God. He sleeps in peace. Remember him, O God, for ever.”\*

\* See also the inscriptions in page 133.

Again, we pray that God would give to the dead “a place of refreshment ;” and so some Christian of the first ages of the Church prayed for one who was buried in the cemetery of Pretextatus :—

BENEMERENTI SORORI BON .. VIII  
KAL NOB.

ΔΕΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΣ ΟΝΝΙΠΟΤΕΣ  
CCHIPIT.. ΤΟΥ . ΡΕΦ . ΙΓΕΡΕ . ΙΝ 

“To my well-deserving sister Bon[osa, who died] on the eighth day before the calends of November. May the Almighty God Christ refresh thy spirit in Christ.”

And again :—

KALEMIRE DEVS REFRIGERET  
SPIRITUM TVVM VNA CVM SO  
RORIS TVÆ HILARE.


“Kalemira, may God refresh thy spirit, together with that of your sister Hilara.”

But we pray, also, that God would give to the departed “clearness of light,” that He would not suffer their souls to be left in darkness. Neither would this petition have sounded strange to the ears of those members of the ancient Church who were accustomed to see daily in their cemeteries such inscriptions as the following, which have now been removed from thence and placed in the gallery at the Lateran Museum :—

DOMINE NE QVANDO ADVMBRETVR  
SPIRITVS VENERIS DE FILIVS IPSEIVS  
QVI SVPERSTITIS SVNT BENEROSVS  
PROJECTVS.

“Lord, let not the spirit of [our mother] Venus be at any time in darkness. Of the number of her

sons, those who survive, Venerosus and Projectus [set up this monument].”

AETERNA TIBI LUX TIMOTHEA IN   
QUAE VIXIT ANN. XIII MENS VIII IN  
PACE

... OS. VII ID. AVG.

“Eternal light be to thee, Timothea, in Christ. She lived thirteen years and nine months [and died] in peace. [She was buried; *deposita*] on the seventh day before the Ides of August.”

The last form of prayers for the dead which we quoted from the Missal were prayers for peace and rest, and that God would vouchsafe to admit the departed into the company of the saints; and these are far too numerous in the inscriptions of the Catacombs than that we should detain our readers by quoting examples. The same may be said also of another prayer for the dead which we still retain in our burial service, and which was perhaps more common than any other in the Catacombs; viz., that the deceased might henceforth “live in God:” *Vivas*, or *Bibas*, *in Deo*, *in Deo Christo*; *ζησαις*, or *ζησης*, *εν Θεω*, *εν Θεω Κυριω Χριστω*. In one case, however, this prayer appears under a somewhat different form:—

ZOSIME VIVAS IN NOMINE  $\overline{\text{XTI}}$ .

“Zosimus, mayest thou live in the name of Christ.”

And this is worth observing, because it furnishes a kind of intermediate link, as it were, between the inscriptions which have been already quoted, and two very remarkable ones which it yet remains to mention:—

RVTA OMNIBVS SVBDITA ET AFFABILIS  
BIBET IN NOMINE PETRI IN PACE ✠

“Ruta,\* subject and affable to all, shall live in the name of Peter in the peace of Christ.”

VIVAS IN NOMINE LAVRETI.

“Mayest thou live in the name of Laurence.”

It is not to our present purpose to inquire into the exact force of these words, *Vivas in nomine*, whether as applied to Christ or to His saints; but only to point out how here, also, the Church of the present day does but repeat the language of the Church of the Catacombs, when, at the deathbed of each of her faithful children, she bids the departing soul “go forth from out of this world,” not only “in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, son of the living God, who suffered for thee, and in the name of the Holy Spirit who was poured forth upon thee,” but also “in the names of angels and archangels, in the name of the holy *Apostles* and Evangelists, in the name of the holy *Martyrs* and Confessors,” &c.

It appears, then, that it is scarcely possible to name a single phrase which is now used by the Church in any of her offices for the dying or the dead, which had not been anticipated by the Christians of the first four centuries in their funeral inscriptions. Let us now go on to inquire whether these same monuments will bear testimony in favour of another article of our holy religion which is often called in question,—the Invocation of Saints. It is clear that the early Christians prayed for the dead: did they also ask any of the dead to pray for them? The last two inscriptions which were quoted hinted

\* Probably misspelt for *Rufa*.

at some connection between the rest and happiness of the deceased and the *nomen* of some apostle or martyr, S. Peter or S. Laurence: there are others, in which the care of the departed soul is still more clearly commended to a favoured servant of God who had preceded in the good fight, and was already entered into everlasting rest:—

REFRIGERI TIBI DOMNUS IPOLITUS SIT.

“May S. Hippolytus be to thee for a refreshment.”

DOMINA \* BASSILLA COMMANDAMVS  
TIBI  
CRESCENTINVS ET MICINA FILIA NOS-  
TRA  
CRESCEN.. QUE VIXIT MEN. X. ET DES...

“We, Crescentinus and Micina, commend to thee, S. Basilla, our daughter Crescentina, who lived ten months and . . . days.”

And another inscription, found, like the last, in the Catacomb of S. Basilla, now called the Catacomb of S. Hermes:—

SOMNO HETERNALI  
AVRELIVS GEMELLVS QUI BIXIT AN...  
ET MESES VIII DIES XVIII MATER  
FILIO  
CARISSIMO BENAEMERENTI FECIT IN  
PA...  
COMMANDO BASSILA INNOCENTIA GE-  
MELLI.†

“In eternal sleep, Aurelius Gemellus, who lived year and eight months and eighteen days. His

\* In the Lateran Gallery, VIII. 17. *Dominus* or *Domina* were used in ancient inscriptions, where we should now use *Sanctus* or *Sancta*.

† Lateran Gallery, VIII. 16.



mother set up this to her dearest, well-deserving son. [He rests] in peace. I commend to thee, O Basilla, the innocence of Gemellus."

Nor were these invocations confined to saints or martyrs of great historical celebrity ; a multitude of private graves are marked by similar inscriptions, begging the prayers of the deceased for the surviving relatives. Prudentius, the first Christian poet, as he is commonly called, introduces into one of his hymns a mother addressing her son, just before his martyrdom, with these words :—

"Vale, ait, dulcissime,  
Et cum beatus regna Christi intraveris,  
*Memento matris, jam patrone ex filio.*"

"Farewell, my sweetest son ; and when you shall have entered into the blessedness of Christ's kingdom, remember your mother, being then my patron, as you are now my son."

Was Prudentius, in these words, availing himself of a poet's licence, and transgressing the strict limits of Christian truth? or was he merely expressing, in a more poetical form, those thoughts and practices with which all of the household of faith had always been familiar? We have already received some answer to this question from the inscriptions still to be seen in the Catacombs of SS. Nereus and Achilles ;\* and a visit to the Lapidarian Gallery at the Lateran will suffice to establish still more unequivocally the character of the reply :—

ANATOLIVS FILIO BENEMERENTI FECIT  
QVI VIXIT ANNIS VII MENSIS VII DIE  
BUS XX. ISPIRITVS TVVS BENE REQUIES  
CAT IN DEO. PETAS PRO SORORE TVA.†

"Anatolius made this for his well-deserving son, who lived seven years, seven months, and twenty

\* See page 133. † Lateran Gallery, VIII. 19.

days. May thy spirit happily rest in God. Pray for thy sister."

AURELIVS AGAPETVS ET AURELIA  
FELICISSIMA ALVMNE FELICITATI  
DIGNISSIMÆ QVE VICSIT ANIS XXX  
ET VI  
ET PETE PRO CELSINIANV COJVGEM.\*

"Aurelius Agapetus and Aurelia Felicissima to their most excellent foster-child Felicitas, who lived thirty-six years; and pray for your husband Celsinianus."

PETE PRO PARENTES TVOS  
MATRONATA MATRONA  
QVE VIXIT AN. I DI. LIII

"Pray for your parents, Matronata Matrona, who lived one year and fifty-two days."†

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟC ΝΗΠΙΟC ΑΚΑΚΟC ΕΝΘΑΔΕ  
ΚΕΙΤΕ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΜΝΗCΚΕCΘΕ  
ΔΕ ΚΑΙ ΗΜΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΑΙC ΑΓΙΑΙC ΥΜΩΝ  
ΠΡΕΥΧΑΙC ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΓΛΥΨΑΤΟC ΚΑΙ  
ΓΡΑΨΑΝΤΟC.

"Dionysius, an innocent child, lies here with the saints: and remember us, too, in your holy prayers, both me who engraved and me who wrote [this inscription]."‡

GENTIANVS FIDELIS IN PACE QVI VIXIT  
ANNIS XXI MENNS VIII DIES  
XVI ET IN ORATIONIS TVIS  
ROGES PRO NOBIS QVIA SCIMVS TE IN ✠ §

"Gentianus, one of the faithful, in peace, who lived twenty-one years, eight months, and sixteen days.

\* No. 21.

† No. 18.

‡ In Museum of Roman College.

§ No. 15.

And in your prayers pray for us, because we know you [to be] in Christ."

We abstain from citing many other examples, which we have seen and copied, lest we should weary our readers; for surely none can affect to misunderstand the testimony of those already adduced. Only, lest it should be objected that, after all, these may be nothing more than instances of error and extravagance on the part of private and ill-instructed individuals, let us add the testimony of an early Pope, engraved on a monument of the same kind, and publicly set up in a very conspicuous place. In the Basilica of S. Agnes beyond the Walls, may be seen the epitaph composed by Pope Damasus in the fourth century, in honour of that saint, and set up at her tomb by himself. In it he first gives some account of her martyrdom, and then concludes by thus invoking her assistance:—

"Ut Damasi precibus faveas, precor, inclita martyr."

"I pray, O noble martyr, that you will hear [be favourable to] the prayers of Damasus."

And he concluded other epitaphs of a similar character (that is to say, monuments in honour of the most famous martyrs) with the very same words. The epitaph also which he composed for the tomb of his sister Irene (who died a nun at the age of twenty) concludes thus:—

"Nostri reminiscere, Virgo,  
Ut tua per Dominum præstet mihi facula lumen."

"Remember me, O virgin, that by God's help your torch may give me light."

These, I believe, are among the most important

particulars on which the sepulchral inscriptions of the Catacombs throw any great light ; or if there be other matters of Christian doctrine, of higher importance in themselves, and capable of receiving equal illustration from the same source, the inscriptions which refer to them require more minute and critical examination than would have been consistent with the limits of our present work. Those which have been quoted are plain and simple, speaking clearly for themselves ; and it is only necessary to add concerning them, that very many, and especially those of the highest importance, belong to the earliest ages of Christianity. For the proofs of this assertion, as also for other inscriptions bearing testimony to the sacraments of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and other mysteries of the Faith, students must be content to await the publication of my learned friend, the Cavaliere de Rossi, which will contain all the Christian inscriptions of Rome during the first six centuries, and of which the specimen which I have seen in print (about two-thirds of the first volume) leaves nothing to desire either in point of beauty and accuracy of typography or copiousness of illustration.

Meanwhile, let the present specimen suffice to satisfy our readers of the great value and interest which attach to these precious relics of Christian antiquity, considered as witnesses to the ancient Faith. We pass by many other points on which their testimony is scarcely less equivocal, because we have been more concerned with their antiquarian than their theological aspect ; we could not, however, altogether omit this view of our subject, both for the sake of the Church's children and also of inquirers after the truth. The Roman Catacombs were brought to light in the sixteenth century, amid the din and

strife of religious controversy, when the passions of men were too hot to allow them to give a fair hearing to a voice issuing from the graves of centuries long gone by. At a moment when even the most time-honoured monuments of antiquity were rudely called in question, and required to produce their credentials afresh, as though the consent of ages were without weight, it was not to be expected that men should readily admit the claims of one which was at once both the newest and the oldest; of one which, while it professed to belong to the very earliest age, had only been rediscovered in the last. It has been reserved to our own day to vindicate to these monuments that high degree of importance which is their due; and if the present volume should help to spread the knowledge of them, and persuade those of our fellow-countrymen who have the opportunity to become more intimately acquainted with them, it will not have been written in vain.

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM.



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